

SEPT.
15¢

POPULAR

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

DETECTIVE

DEATH HALTS A HOLIDAY

A Mystery Novel

By EDWARD
CHURCHILL

ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN
STEWART STERLING
BRUNO FISCHER
JOE ARCHIBALD
DALE CLARK



Amazing 2 for 1 Offer!

Paint Your Car with LUSTR-WIPE

THE MIRACLE NEW AUTO ENAMEL THAT
WIPES ON WITH A POWDER PUFF!

Fix Body and Fenders WITH DURO AUTO BODY SOLDER AT NO EXTRA COST!



GUARANTEED FOR 2 YEARS
Not to crack, chip, peel or fade if simple directions are followed. LUSTR-WIPE is NOT a wax or polish but a marvelous Auto Enamel.

**ONE QUART OF
LUSTR-WIPE**

**PAINTS YOUR ENTIRE CAR
Anyone Can Do a Beautiful Job**

LUSTR-WIPE is different than any auto enamel you ever tried. WORKS LIKE MAGIC! Almost ANYONE can paint his own car and get a high gloss finish that looks like a professional spray job. JUST WIPE IT ON with a powder puff. NO BRUSH. NO SPRAY. NO MASKING. NO STREAKS. NO LAPMARKS. Takes about an hour to get a brilliant "factory-finish." Dries dust-free in an hour. Goes over any enamel or lacquer.

**NO BRUSHING
NO SPRAYING
NO MASKING
NO STREAKS**

**BOTH
LUSTR-WIPE New
Auto Enamel and
DURO Auto Body Solder
AT ONE PRICE**

only \$ **3.95**
Applicator
Furnished

**SEND
NO
MONEY
MAIL
COUPON
NOW**

10 POPULAR COLORS

BLACK \$3.95 Qt.
GREY (Gunmetal) Dark or Air Wing 3.95 Qt.
Light 3.95 Qt.
GREEN (Brewster) Dark or Jewel Light 3.95 Qt.
Light 3.95 Qt.
BLUE Washington Dark or Monticello-
Light 3.95 Qt.
RED or MAROON or SUN BEIGE (tan) 3.95 Qt.

SEND NO MONEY! ORDER TODAY!
Mail money postpaid. Then pay postman for LUSTR-WIPE plus postal charges. DURO Auto Body Solder will be included AT NO EXTRA COST, or if you need money with order, WE pay postage.



DURO PLASTIC METAL BODY SOLDER FIXES FENDERS AND BODIES LIKE NEW

DURO is foolproof—EASY TO USE. Fixes rust spots, cracked and dented fenders, body dents and rusted out holes QUICK AND EASY. Just apply right out of the can with putty-knife. Dries to metallic hardness overnight. Can be filed down smooth, sanded to the same finish as metal and painted. You never know it's there.

**Fenders
Rusted
Out?**

**A Can of DURO GIVEN
with Every Quart of LUSTR-WIPE**

LUSTR-WIPE CORP., 166 W. WASHINGTON ST., CHICAGO 2, ILL.

**AGENTS AND
DISTRIBUTORS
WANTED**

Write for tried and tested money-making plan. Also our special quantity prices.

LUSTR-WIPE CORP., 166 W. WASHINGTON, DEPT. 94, CHICAGO 2, ILL.
Please send me _____ qts. of LUSTR-WIPE Auto Enamel at \$3.95 Qt.
With each quart include a can of DURO Auto Body Solder AT NO EXTRA COST.

COLORS

- ☐ Send Postpaid, Full Payment of \$ _____ (Check or M.O.) Enclosed
☐ Send C. O. D. plus Postal Charges
☐ Send Information for Agents

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____



To the man who wants to enjoy an ACCOUNTANT'S CAREER

IF you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period in your life? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of \$3,000 to \$10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of real worth to his employers. He has *standing*!

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you could do this—and if you could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the LaSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C. P. A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

As you go along, you absorb the principles of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Statistical Control, Organization, Management and Finance.

Your progress is as speedy as you care to make it—depending on your own eagerness to learn and the time you spend in study.

Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained*. It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

Write For This Free Book

For your own good, don't put off investigation of *all* the facts. Write for our free 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays." It'll prove that accountancy offers brilliant futures to those who aren't afraid of serious home study. Send us the coupon *now*.

Over 2600 Certified
Public Accountants among
LaSalle alumni

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

417 South Dearborn Street, Dept. 9329-H

Chicago 5, Illinois

I want to be an accountant. Send me, without cost or obligation, the 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays," and full information about your accountancy training program.

Name _____

Address _____ City _____

Position _____ Age _____



POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXV, No. 2

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

SEPTEMBER, 1948

A MYSTERY NOVEL



Death Halts a Holiday

by Edward Churchill

Framed for the murder of a client in an Arizona desert town, Private Detective Nick Blade must fit a jigsaw of clues into a picture of crime! 11

A COMPLETE NOVELET

- BLACK SHEEP KILL.** Dale Clark 56
It all began with a broken theatre date — and it ended in a strange and baffling drama of violent and mysterious murder!

FIVE SHORT STORIES

- STUCK WITH THE EVIDENCE.** Joe Archibald 46
When it's Ferdinand Fingly's finale, Willie Klump gets busy!
- GUNS ARE HANDY THINGS.** Robert Sidney Bowen 72
Chet Lacey takes on the chore of bringing Alec Keltner home
- MURDER TURNS THE CURVE.** Bruno Fischer 84
There are certain times when an accident is — not an accident!
- ALIBI BABY.** Stewart Sterling 93
A water-soaked derby hat leads Steve Koski to a double murder
- AMY STOPS THE CLOCK.** Sam Merwin, Jr. 103
The gargantuan Miss Brewster fortifies herself for a hard case

FEATURES

- OFFICIAL BUSINESS.** The Editor 6
A friendly department where our readers and the editor meet
- THE STORY BEHIND DILLINGER'S DEATH.** Jackson Hite 80
First of a series on little-known facts about famous crimes

POPULAR DETECTIVE, published every other month by Better Publications, Inc., at 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues), \$1.80; single copies, \$.15. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter April 14, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N.Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1948, by Better Publications, Inc. In communicating with this magazine, please include your postal zone number, if any. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Printed in U.S.A.

THERE'S NO SECRET OF SUCCESS!

SUCCESS

COME ON IN!



THE FORMULA for success in industry and business is an open book—no secret about it at all. Promotion comes when you've *trained* yourself to handle bigger jobs, *prepared* for larger responsibilities.

Such training you'll find in a library of extremely literal books—and it's up to you to open them and keep on opening them until you've mastered their contents. You can do this in your spare time for these are the easy-to-understand texts of the International Correspondence Schools with the teacher, "built right in."

Covering more than 400 practical subjects, I. C. S. Courses have aided thousands of men and women to win better jobs and larger rewards in every business and industrial field. These thousands are the proof of the familiar saying, "Today's I. C. S. student is tomorrow's leader."

Mark and mail the coupon and you can be on the way to joining them. It brings you full information on the subject you're interested in. Act today—if you're serious about becoming a success!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

ICS

BOX 3967-M, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| ☐ Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses | ☐ Structural Engineering | ☐ Industrial Engineering | ☐ Textile Courses |
| ☐ Heating | ☐ Surveying and Mapping | ☐ Industrial Metallurgy | ☐ Cotton Manufacturing |
| ☐ Refrigeration | ☐ Communications Courses | ☐ Machine Shop | ☐ Teryn Weaving |
| ☐ Chemistry Courses | ☐ Electronics | ☐ Mechanical Drafting | ☐ Textile Dyeing |
| ☐ Chemical Engineering | ☐ Practical Telegraphy | ☐ Mechanical Engineering | ☐ Woolen Manufacturing |
| ☐ Chemistry, Analytical | ☐ Radio, General | ☐ Mold-Loft Work | |
| ☐ Chemistry, Industrial | ☐ Radio Operating | ☐ Patternmaking—Wood, Metal | |
| ☐ Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel | ☐ Radio Servicing | ☐ Sewing Shop Blueprints | |
| ☐ Petroleum Refining | ☐ Telegraph Engineering | ☐ Sheet-Metal Drafting | |
| ☐ Pulp and Paper Making | ☐ Electrical Courses | ☐ Ship Drafting | |
| ☐ Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses | ☐ Electrical Drafting | ☐ Tool Designing | |
| ☐ Architecture | ☐ Electrical Engineering | ☐ Toolmaking | |
| ☐ Architectural Drafting | ☐ Electric Light and Power | ☐ Welding—Gas and Electric | |
| ☐ Bridge and Building Foreman | ☐ Lighting Technician | ☐ Railroad Courses | |
| ☐ Building Estimating | ☐ Practical Electrician | ☐ Air Brakes | |
| ☐ Civil Engineering | ☐ Internal Combustion Engines Courses | ☐ Diesel Locomotive | |
| ☐ Coal Mining | ☐ Auto Technicians | ☐ Locomotive Engineer | |
| ☐ Contracting and Building | ☐ Diesel-Electric | ☐ Locomotive Fireman | |
| ☐ Highway Engineering | ☐ Diesel Engines | ☐ Railroad Section Foreman | |
| ☐ Lumber Dealer | ☐ Gas Engines | ☐ Steam Engineering Courses | |
| ☐ Reading Structural Blueprints | ☐ Aeronautical Engineer's, Jr. | ☐ Boilermaking | |
| ☐ Sanitary Engineering | ☐ Aircraft Drafting | ☐ Combustion Engineering | |
| ☐ Structural Drafting | ☐ Flight Engineer | ☐ Engine Running | |
| | ☐ Foundry Work | ☐ Marine Engineering | |
| | ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals | ☐ Steam Electric | |
| | | ☐ Steam Engines | |

Name _____ Home Address _____

City _____ State _____

Age _____ Present Position _____ Working Hours _____ A.M. to _____ P.M.

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Special discount to World War II Veterans. Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canada, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

Official Business



A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

HEAT lightning played above the sweltering midtown streets. Now and then jagged forks, darting out of a late September sky, flicked at the RCA building that lifted a sixth of a mile above New York's Rockefeller Center.

At the Fiftieth Street edge of the Plaza, a cab waited under a drooping plane tree. A little ahead and across the street stood a yellow sedan. Except for those two cars, the long block was empty.

The driver of the cab mopped at his dripping face and neck. "Sorry about losing that cab we was following," he said. "You think they'll show up here?"

"I hope so, Lip."

Halcyon's Quest

Nicholas Halcyon, a small, dapper, white-haired man, cool and immaculate in a white linen suit, stared intently out across the shadowed Plaza. Neat waxed spikes on his white mustache, the tilt of his head, and an expectant glint in his eyes gave him the look of an alert and wily fox.

Lip Sisko's mopping handkerchief halted. "Hard to keep a hack in sight all the way in from LaGuardia Field," he said, apologetic. "That short stout guy, he got off the Clipper, did he?"

"From South America, yes."

Sisko fanned himself. "Friend of yours, Halcy?"

Nicholas Halcyon smoothed his mustache. "No, Lip, I'd never seen him before."

There was no point in confessing that his interest was not in the man, but in the man's luggage or, more precisely, in something which, if Halcyon's information was correct, should be in that luggage.

"The woman—"

"The woman," Halcyon said, "was merely there to meet him."

Sisko grinned. "She could meet me any night of the week." He whistled admiringly between his teeth. "And built!"

But Halcyon was not listening. A cab coming toward them from Sixth Avenue had started to turn into the Plaza, faltered as the driver saw the one-way arrow against him, and coasted on to stop by the curb only a few yards away.

Halcyon was staring at the cab, his fox eyes bright and cunning.

A tall woman in black got out and hurried across toward the RCA building. Under one arm she carried an oblong white bag, in the other hand a white picture hat. As she passed under a light, her hair glinted richly red. Her companion, a short, stocky, hatless man, lifted his bags out of the cab, swung two camera cases over his shoulder, and started to pay the driver.

Halcyon, who had given the woman only a quick glance—but a pleased one as her red hair leaped alive in the light—was now watching the stocky man, absorbed.

Lip Sisko gasped, "Hey! Looka that!"

The Purse-Snatcher

A man, lurking in shadow by the building, had seized the red-haired woman. But even as Halcyon leaped up to see, the event took a sudden turn.

The woman, with a sweep of her arm, tossed her white bag high into the air like a *jal-alai* pelota. Perhaps she meant to hurl it back to her escort at the cab. Perhaps her only intent was to put it out of reach for the instant. But whatever she planned, the force of her toss outran her aim. There was a tinkling crash, the bag plummeted through a second story window, and the purse-snatcher turned and fled down the empty Plaza toward Forty-eighth Street, Red-hair in pursuit.

Sisko was about to leap out when Halcyon gripped his shoulder.

"Wait!" Halcyon snapped. His eyes were on the broken second story window where the bag had disappeared.

The stocky man had thrown his camera

(Continued on Page 8)

THOUSANDS NOW PLAY

who never thought they could!



Thrilled by Playing

I've had my lessons just a week. I think your course is super. I was more thrilled than words can express when I found I could actually play America, The Merry Widow Waltz and the others.

*J. T., Manassas, Mich.



Wouldn't Take \$1000 for Course

The lessons are so simple that anyone can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course.

*B. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.



Shares Course With Sister

The teaching is so interesting and the pieces so beautiful I couldn't ask for anything better. I recommend your course highly. My sister shares it with me and feels the same way.

*D. E. G., Waukegan, Wisc.



Finding New Joy

I am finding a new joy that I never experienced before, for I have always wanted to play, but had given up hope until I heard of your course.

*C. B. Lucien, Okla.



Plays After 2 Months

I hesitated before sending for your course because of an earlier experience I had with a course by ear from another company. I am playing pieces now I never dreamed I would play after only two months.

*E. T., Prichard, Ala.

*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

You, too, can play any instrument

By this EASY A-B-C Method

YOU think it's difficult to learn music? That's what thousands of others have thought! Just like you, they long to play some instrument—the piano, violin, guitar, saxophone or other favorites. But they denied themselves the pleasure—because they thought it took months and years of tedious study to learn.

Learn in Spare Time at Home

And then they made an amazing discovery! They learned about a wonderful way to learn music at home—without a private teacher—without tedious study—and in a surprisingly short time. They wrote to the U. S. School of Music for the facts about this remarkable short-cut method. And the facts opened their eyes! They were amazed to find how easy it was to learn.

The result? Over 850,000 men and women have studied music at home this simple, A-B-C way. Now, all over the world, enthusiastic music-lovers are enjoying the thrilling satisfaction of creating their own music. They have found the key to good times, popularity and profit.

Costs only few cents a Day

And that's what you can do, right now. Get the proof that you, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument—quickly, easily, in

spare time at home for only a few cents a day. Never mind if you have no musical knowledge or talent. Just read the fascinating booklet and Print and Picture sample that explain all about the U. S. School method. (Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit.) Tear out the coupon now, before you turn the page. U. S. School of Music, 2949 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y. (50th year)

NOTICE

Prices of our courses have not gone up. Music lessons still cost only a few cents a day. Remember, we don't teach music "by ear" or by numbers. We teach you to play by standard notes.

FREE!

Print and Picture Sample

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC,
2949 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y.

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet "How to Learn Music at Home," and your free Print and Picture Sample.

Piano	Saxophone	Clarinet	Violoncello
Guitar	Trumpet, Cornet	Flute	Contra
Hawaiian	Reed Organ	Modern	Piccolo
Guitar	Tenor Banjo	Elementary	Mandolin
Violin	Ukulele	Harmony	
Piano Accordion			

Name _____ Have you _____
(Please print) instrument?

Address _____

City _____ State _____

NOTE: If you are under 16 years of age, parent must sign coupon.

SAVE 3c—STICK COUPON ON PENNY POSTCARD

AUDELS Carpenters and Builders Guides 4 vols. \$6



Inside Trade Information
for Carpenters, Builders, Joiners, Building Mechanics and all craftsmen. These Guides give you the short-cut instructions that you need—tested, proven methods, ideas, solutions, hints, systems and money-saving suggestions. An easy progressive course for the beginner and the student. A practical daily helper and Quick Reference for the master carpenter. Carpenters everywhere praise these Guides as a lifetime hand to master Work, Better Work and better Pay. To get this assistance for yourself, simply fill in and mail the **FREE COUPON** below.

Inside Trade Information On:

How to use the steel square—How to file and set saws—How to build furniture—How to use a mitre box—How to use the chalk line—How to use rules and scales—How to make joints—Carpenters arithmetic—Solving measurement problems—Estimating square feet of timbers—How to set girders and sills—How to frame houses and roofs—How to estimate costs—How to build houses, barns, garages, bunkhouses, etc.—How to read and draw plans—Drawing up specifications—How to excavate—How to use settings 12, 18 and 17 on the steel square—How to build joints and roof trusses—How to build stairs—How to put on interior trim—How to hang doors—How to lay floors—How to paint.



AUDELS, Publishers, 49 W. 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.
Mail Audels Carpenters and Builders Guides, 4 vols., on 7 days' free trial, if OK I will remit \$1 in 7 days and \$1 monthly with \$2.50 paid. Otherwise I will return them. No obligation unless I am satisfied.

Name

Address

Occupation

Employed by PAL

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!"



Help Bring Crooks to Justice Through Scientific CRIME DETECTION!

We have taught thousands this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let us teach you in your own home. We teach: Fingerprinting, Piracy Identification, Police Photography, Secret Service Methods thoroughly, quickly, at small cost. Over 80 of our American Bureau of Identification employ U.S. Agents or graduates. We can prepare you for this fascinating work, during spare time. Write today, asking us for "Blue Book of Crime."

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE, 1520 Somerville Ave., Dept. 7998 Chicago 40, Ill.

ASTHMA

Don't let coughing, sneezing, choking, recurring attacks of Bronchial Asthma ruin sleep and energy another day without trying Mendoc. This great internal medicine is tasteless and taken exactly as directed works thru the blood, thus reaching the bronchial tubes and lungs. Usually starts working in nature immediately to remove thick, sticky mucus, thus alleviating coughing and promoting freer breathing and more refreshing sleep. Get Mendoc from your druggist today. Money back guaranteed unless completely satisfied.



OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD! TRAIN FOR A FUTURE IN

DIESEL

Prepare for the big earning power of Diesel Trained Men. Start learning at home. In spare time. UET's easy, practical training covers all phases of DIESEL engine operation, fuel systems, auxiliary equipment, repairs and maintenance. When home course is completed, you come to Chicago for actual shop practice on DIESEL MOTORS under expert instructors, at UET's fine, modern school. BEGIN AT ONCE—GET ALL THE FACTS FREE. WRITE TODAY!

DIESEL DIVISION UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE
8521 Sheffield Ave., Dept. 1098-D, Chicago 14, Illinois

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from Page 6)

cases and bags back into the cab and was now racing after the woman.

Nicholas Halcyon's mustache danced. He said, "Wait for me, Lip," jumped out and ran toward the awning at the Plaza entrance to the building.

That's the fast-action start of the bang-up mystery novelet featured in the next issue: **THE RADIO CITY MYSTERY** by Kurt Steel.

More trouble isn't long in developing for Nick Halcyon. When he gets into the room where he knew the bag must have landed, he finds not the bag—but a corpse! And it is no ordinary corpse. The head is a neat white egg of swathing bandages, hair and features completely hidden. Over the eyes is a slit like a visor. And the body is still warm!

THE RADIO CITY MYSTERY is a story of suspense and unusual drama. And it is one of the cleverest novels ever to come from the platen of its brilliant author—Kurt Steel.

Murder by Cyanide

Next, more thrills in another swell novelet: **THE BEAUTIFUL ANGEL OF DEATH**, by Wyatt Blassingame.

Sam Bird was in a spot. A man he had good reason to kill had been murdered. And the evidence pointed to Sam. The real killer had planned it well. Using cyanide to accomplish his task, he figured his victim would succumb to it in bed, and since the man was old and had a bad heart, no one would suspect a thing.

But as it happened, the intended victim was not in bed, and when the poison took effect he fell in a bayou. There was a scar on his head from hitting the piling, and because persons thought Sam Bird might have killed him, there was an autopsy which showed the poison.

And Sam Bird was known to have recently purchased a quantity of cyanide!

There is plenty of taut suspense and slam-bang action in this Florida background novelet of an ex-G.I. filling station operator who has to solve a murder—or forfeit his own life. You'll enjoy—**THE BEAUTIFUL ANGEL OF DEATH!**

There'll be a whole flock of grand short-stories to round out the issue, including an

Three Novels in Every Issue of

TRIPLE DETECTIVE

NOW ON SALE—ONLY 25¢ EVERYWHERE!

hilarious new Willie Klump story -by Joe Archibald. It looks like another swell issue, so look forward to it, fans!

LETTERS FROM READERS

THIS is the place where you readers gather and get acquainted. Through your letters and postcards you let each other know what you think of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**, and any ideas you have about what should be changed or improved. It's always interesting to hear opinions of the various stories. So speak up, and let the other readers know what you think.

There are three generations in my family who read **POPULAR DETECTIVE**. Grandpa reads it, Dad and Mother read it, and now I read it too. I think it's swell, especially **WALK SOFTLY DEATH**, by Arthur Leo Zagat and **MURDER BY MIRRORS**, by O. B. Myers. I thought the stories by Sam Merwin, Jr. and David X. Manners were tops too. But the Willie Klump story wasn't as funny as usual.—Carney J. Lease, Scranton, Pa.

That Willie Klump story was a howl.—Jackie Kanakaris, Big Spring, Texas.

Why don't you tell the name of the story the picture on the cover illustrates? It wasn't until I finished **MURDER BY MIRRORS**, by O. B. Myers that I discovered the picture on the cover fit. Right on the front of the magazine you could print: Cover picture from—and then have the name of the story. It would make it more interesting, for the reader always wants to know what story a picture is for.—Syl T. Jekkins, Jr., Portland, Ore.

Sounds like a good idea, Syl. Thanks for the suggestion.

I enjoy **POPULAR DETECTIVE** very much, but it doesn't come out often enough to suit me. There just aren't any other magazines as good.—Mary Ellen Carter, Croton, N. Y.

Have you tried our companion magazines? Such as **THRILLING DETECTIVE**, **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**, **G-MEN DETECTIVE**—and others.

I like detective stories with plenty of curvy babes in them, and that's why **CORPSE ON THE CARPET**, by Louis L'Amour, was just my dish. That one was really a honey!—Martin Q. Smith, Los Angeles, Calif.

Thanks for the letters everybody, and we'll be back next issue with a big bag full of them. We hope **YOURS** is among them. Sit down and write us today. Address all letters and postcards to The Editor, **POPULAR DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. See you all next issue. Until then—happy reading!

—THE EDITOR

BE A MANAGER IN ANYTHING YOU DO WITH PROGRESSIVE POWER

WILLIE KLUMP

The Jovett System is the greatest in the world. It's the only one that's been tested by the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force.

George F. Jovett

Albany, N.Y.

ALL 5 FAMOUS JOWETT COURSES

1 Volume 25c

Let's Go, Pal! I'll prove I can make YOU "ALL-AROUND" HE-MAN

Fast-of-the-Coast says George F. Jovett, World's Greatest Body Builder

"Progressive Power" Strength Secrets Give 10 Easy Minutes a Day — Without Strain!

"I'll teach you the 'Progressive Power Method' through which I rebuilt myself from a physical wreck the doctors condemned to die at 18, to the holder of more strength records than any other living athlete or teacher."

"Progressive Power" has proven its ability to build the strongest, handsomest men in the world. And I stand ready to show you on a money back basis—that no matter how fat, or puny you are I can do the same for you right in your own home. Let me prove I can add inches to your arms, broaden your shoulders, give you a man-sized chest, powerful legs and a Rock-like back—in fact, power pack your whole body so quickly it will amaze you! Yes, I'll jam you with power and confidence to master any situation—to win popularity—and to get ahead on the job! Through my proven secrets I bring to life new power in your inside and out. Until YOU are fully satisfied you are the man you want to be.

PROVE IT TO YOURSELF IN ONE NIGHT

Send only 25c for my 5 easy-to-follow, picture-packed courses now in 1 complete volume "How to Become a Muscular He-Man." Try it for one night—experience the thrilling strength that surges through your muscles.

I am making a drive for thousands of new friends fast—REGARDLESS OF COST!

SO GET NOW MY 5 Muscle COURSES (Valued at \$5 each)

All in 1 Great Complete Volume Packed With How-To-Do-It Pictures!

Now, this "get-acquainted," 100-page, extremely low price of only 25c is your chance to build a body you'll be proud of! Follow Jovett's easy method of muscle building NOW!

FREE!

How to BECOME a MUSCULAR HE-MAN

FREE GIFT COUPON!

Jovett Institute of Physical Culture Dept. TP-89

280 Fifth Avenue, New York 1, N. Y.

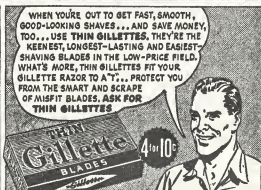
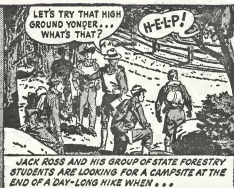
Dear Gents:—Please send by return mail, prepaid, **FREE** Jovett's Photo Book of Strong Men, along with all 5 Muscle Building Courses.

1. Molding a Mighty Chest, 2. Molding a Mighty Arm, 3. Molding a Mighty Grip, 4. Molding a Mighty Back, 5. Molding a Mighty Leg—now in One Volume "How to Become a Muscular He-Man." Enclosed send 25c. NO C.O.D.'s.

NAME _____ AGE _____

ADDRESS _____

IT WAS NIP AND TUCK FOR JACK UNTIL...





DEATH halts a holiday

Framed for the murder of a client in an Arizona desert town, Private Detective Nick Blade must fit a jigsaw of clues into a picture of crime!

CHAPTER I

Frightened Lady

IF I OWNED a house in this bleak subdivision, Longridge, how would I find it when tight? Not that I'd live in the

monotonous dump, which was a part of Las Verdes, three hundred dusty miles from Los Angeles where I camp in a one-room apartment, and have a dingy office.

I'd spent fifteen minutes finding the crackerbox I was looking for—1339 Mc-

a novel by EDWARD CHURCHILL

Cracken. The only difference between this stucco box and the others was that there was a light in the living room.

As I shot my flashlight beam onto the number I saw one of the laths in the Venetian blinds tip up furtively. I hiked up the walk. I relaxed my long, lean and weary frame against the stucco wall as I punched the doorbell.

Nothing happened.

This kind of treatment after the drive up from L.A. and the fact it was midnight—when the telegram had said to be there—burned me. I jabbed viciously. After about two minutes the door opened as far as it could with a chain holding it. I caught a glimpse of midnight hair, a wide dark eye, a cheek with a soft curve, a flash of chartreuse cloth and a carmine toenail sticking out of an open-toed sandal. Put them all together and you had fright—maybe terror.

"What do you want?" The voice was soft and throaty, but it added to my fear theory.

"M. Davis," I answered. "Let's skip this Mata Hari stuff. I want in."

"I don't know you," came from a dry throat.

I started fishing around in a pocket.

"You sent me a telegram," I said.

"You can't get away with that corny gag. I didn't send anybody a telegram. Beat it."

I shoved the telegram through the three-inch space between door and jamb. I got a glimpse of long, catmine nails. She was reading:

MEET ME MY HOME 1339 MCCracken, LONGRIDGE, LAS VERDES, MIDNIGHT TO-NIGHT. M. DAVIS.

The gasp I heard had surprise in it.

"Five hundred bucks came with the wire," I said.

The door opened, and I held back a low whistle. She had an oval face, soft skin, pale under the slanting light. She looked like a kid who'd seen a ghost. Her nose was small and thoroughbred. Her lips weren't as full as the heavy lipstick made them, but adequate. Her shoulder-length bob, reminded me of the shiny coat of a well-fed black cat.

SHE WAS a tall girl—the showgirl type, strictly. The chartreuse combination—a loose, full jacket and slacks suggested legs that ought to be in the front row of any chorus.

"Now that you know all my secrets," she said, "come in."

I did.

She closed the door behind me, put on the chain lock. I walked into the living room, which was just about as personal and homey as a cake of soap in a public bath. Strictly mail order. Loud plush divan and chair to match. A rug that would frighten a dog out of lying on it. An unpainted bookcase, with no books.

"Getting back to the telegram," I said, as I faced her. "You sent it?"

"There's been a mix-up."

"How?"

"Merle, my husband—his initial is 'M' too—was supposed to be home. He isn't. I should be working in the show out at La Casa Grande. I got a headache and came home."

Her dark eyes, now curious rather than fearing, went over me. Sometimes I look as if I was in my late twenties, even with the shots of gray through my hair and my rather horsey face. Other times, when I'm tired, like tonight, I look forty. Actually, I'm thirty-five. I knew my gray eyes were bloodshot and my rumpled gray double-breasted suit didn't help any.

"Why did my husband send for you?"

The words brought my glance to hers.

"I'm a private detective," I replied.

As I looked at M. Davis, I was both drawn and repelled. She stirred the wolf in me, but reason told me if I went that way she'd hang up my pelt.

"So it's gone that far," she said. "Drink?"

"Scotch," I told her.

She went into the kitchen, and came back with ice cubes, bottles of Scotch and Bourbon, glasses and a pitcher of water. I poured myself a stiff one and downed it, chasing it with water. She mixed one, sipped it, and started pacing up and down as if she was surrounded by bars.

"As long as we're working the graveyard shift," I said, "we might as well uncomplicate things."

"I've got to get out of here," she answered.

I didn't feel like going anywhere—not with the Scotch on the coffee table.

"I'm Nick Blade," I said. "Let's get acquainted."

"I saw your name on the telegram. The 'M' in mine is for Maxine."

The telephone banged with the abrupt-



Beside the body now, I saw that the Franz Josef knife was in just the right place to get the heart

ness of a corpse sitting up in a casket. I saw fear tighten her face. She picked up the instrument as if she was afraid it was going to bite her.

"Yes, it is." Her voice was tight, too. "What's that? . . . I wouldn't know . . . You can't phone him. The Estrella Club hasn't one . . . Go ahead . . . Thanks."

She cradled the telephone, perplexed, and turned to me.

"I'd swear it was the same voice again."

"So?"

"It's a man's voice. The guy who's been calling up asking questions. This time he said he was with Trans-Globe Airways. He asked if Merle was here."

"What did he want?"

"He said he wanted to know when Merle was coming in to pick up his reservations for New York." Her eyes were filled with dark fire.

I got up, riffled the telephone directory, asked for a number.

"Trans Globe?" I asked. "This is Davis—Merle Davis. About my reservations . . . They are? . . . Thanks. You called a few minutes ago?"

I cradled the telephone.

"He's got reservations, but it wasn't Trans-Globe that called just now."

Maxine started pacing again.

"He goes out on Flight Five—five-forty tomorrow afternoon," I said.

She whirled on me.

"He's not going."

Her voice was so sharp it sent icy fingers up my back. She crooked her finger at me and went into the bedroom. I followed. She snapped the light switch, opened the top drawer of the chiffonier, lifted a pile of handkerchiefs and handed me a little booklet with a Government seal on it. I looked inside it.

THE PICTURE showed a man of about thirty, with even features, a zit of a mustache, curly blond hair. The passports were for Germany and Austria.

She switched off the light when I'd put the booklet back.

"He thought he was getting away with something," she tossed over her shoulder as I followed her back into the living room. "He sneaked down to L.A. for those."

"He's the kind women go for."

"And that's news?" I felt the fingers chilling my spine again.

I sat down, poured another drink, and looked at the silver knife on the coffee table. I picked it up. It was beautiful—had that something only a craftsman can give. The blade was long and sharp and thin. The handle was unadorned except for the royal crest.

I weighed it, said:

"Hohenzollern?"

"Franz Josef. Merle brought it back to me as a gift from Europe."

Something made me think a guy should never give a knife like this to a dame like this.

I put it down. I saw Maxine stop pacing as if she'd been slapped. She darted to the window as I heard the hum of the engine. I followed her and looked under the Venetian lath she lifted.

"It's them again!" she snapped.

I saw a car approach slowly, only parking lights on. It went by. I heard the acceleration of the engine. I backed up from the window and looked at Maxine.

"Them?" I asked.

"It, or him or she or them." The fear was back in her face. Fear and anger. "It's been coming by like that for several nights. Always about this time."

I knew hysteria. It was there when she spat:

"I can't stand this! I'm getting out of here!"

"Okay," I said. "Where away?"

"The Estrella Club's fifteen miles out on the Rock City road."

"Your husband's there?"

She pulled a short fur jacket out of the closet. "Yes."

"What does he do?"

"Gambler. He deals for the house. The house is doing all right, too."

"Fast hands?"

She got into the jacket, picked up a black leather purse from a table.

"His hands went to college."

We went outside. She closed the door and tested it, then started out as if I wasn't with her. I caught up. She looked at me through her lashes, her eyes cold and distant, as if she was brushing off a guy in a bar.

"Maybe you're tired," she said, and I felt she hoped so. "You can drive me into town, get a room at a hotel. I'll take a taxi to the Estrella Club. You can see Merle in the morning."

I gave her the chilling side glance right back.

"A guy made a date with me for midnight. He didn't show. In my business, that makes a man curious."

She shrugged. "Maybe there's a big play at the club. When there is, he has to stay."

We were walking toward the car. She stopped, fumbled in her purse quite a time.

"I forgot something," she said.

"I'll go back with you."

"Wait here!" That cracked like a whip.

I watched her go inside. The Venetians were pulled so close to vertical I couldn't see what she was doing. She came out, shaking the folds from a handkerchief as if she wanted me to be sure and see it. She tucked it into her purse.

WE WENT to my coupe. I helped her in and slipped into the driver's seat. As I drove off she told me to turn right at the next corner. Then it was right again by the Longridge Theatre, and an angle right into the divided Rock City highway.

She was quiet and her face was flat and dead in the shadows.

"What's eating on you?" I asked.

"Why would Merle hire a private dick the night before he takes off for Europe?"

"You answer that one. You're his wife."

"He's not talking. He hasn't talked to me—the way he used to—since he got back from overseas. We're strangers. Take for instance, the dog."

"Dog?"

"He never takes it off when he's up and around. When he goes to bed at night he puts it and a gun under his pillow."

"What kind of a dog?"

"A golden dog. A gimmick. He wears it hanging on his watch chain between his two shirt pockets. You'll see it when you see him."

CHAPTER II

Murder Deals a Hand

SIGNS along the road said Sidney, and then Hickman, and then Henricks. All I could see was the glow of Maxine's cigarette until she started looking

through the rear window. We rolled through motley lights and out into the desert again. She grabbed my arm so quickly I swerved the car.

"It's them!" she exclaimed.

"Who?"

"I don't know. But they've been following us since the other side of Hendricks . . . Look Blade—act like you've got trouble. Pull off the road."

I swung so that my headlights penciled across the highway. The car behind rolled by—a sedan carrying a man and woman. My eyes caught the green dress—a vivid flash of color. That was all, except for the California license which flicked in and out of the light so fast I couldn't get it.

"Go ahead now," Maxine said, her voice low, dry.

I shifted into high. The engine began to pull us up a long straight hill toward what looked like a pass. Ahead, twin rows of lights made a necklace out to the highway. Then I could see a white pillbox building sharply cut out against the black sky beyond the pass.

"That's it," Maxine said, and her voice reminded me again that she didn't want me around.

I counted a score of cars as I turned into the gravel drive, ran my front bumper close to a wall, killed the engine.

We went in through a big screen door. The Estrella Club was divided into two low-ceilinged rooms of about equal size. To the left was the dining room, eerie in soft-shadowed lights from the tables, at which a few couples sat. A cowboy orchestra whined from a platform at the far end.

The room to the right was brighter. Straight ahead I saw a bar under a sort of canopy. To the right of that were the rest rooms and a group of chromium-legged imitation leather chairs and a couple of divans. To the right of me were the tables—blackjack, roulette, craps. They were crowded.

I don't think Merle Davis saw us come in. The plump blonde who was standing by, idly watching him deal, did. That is, she saw Maxine. She stiffened. I thought of a cat, its back arched, spitting on a back fence. I looked at Maxine. I thought of another cat.

The blonde relaxed, sauntered to the far end of the bar. Maxine went to the near end and slipped onto a stool, joining a bunch of automatons lined up like

tin soldiers with drinks instead of guns.

There was no mistaking Davis back of the blackjack table. He was better looking than the passport photographer had made him. His long legs were hooked around the stool as he measured the players, waiting for them to shove out their bets. From the waist up he widened like a boxer or a cowpuncher to taut shoulders and muscled arms.

His shirt, open at the throat, had two pockets. I saw the golden dog, suspended on a thin gold chain. The metal was rough, about an inch long, and the body was about half an inch in diameter.

I sized the guy up in one word—predatory. That went for anything he could lay his hands on, including women. He had a chin that jutted beligerently, a wide mouth with thin acquisitive lips, a rather long nose, and hard gray eyes that were a bit too close together. They smoldered with worry or some other deep-down conflict. He had plenty of curly blond hair.

Then the hands went to work—sensitive hands, with long tapering fingers. What had Maxine called them—"college hands?" They were post-graduate. They were chained lightning.

A fat Iowaish dame played a loud game with quarters. A stolid old goat in a peaked hat and a sweat-stained shirt, and who had more lines in his face than a railway map of Chicago had a pile of silver in front of him. A fried brunette was having trouble adding up her cards.

The young fellow on the end didn't seem to be doing so well. I liked his looks. He was gold and tan. Golden hair, cut G.I. A tan face with blue eyes, a smile that made me think he was feeling cynical about the whole set-up. His body was tight in a G.I. shirt, crisp G.I. trousers that said it hadn't been long since he was a Joe. Too bad about his right ear. He only had half of it.

THIS was no time to tell Merle Davis I was Nick Blade, and ask him why he had sent me five hundred bucks and an invitation to a date he hadn't kept.

The last shot of Maxine Davis' Scotch was letting me down. She was talking to a pop-eyed guy of about fifty at one end of the bar.

I saw two vacant stools and took one of them. The skinny bartender, who had curly black hair and a flushed face, peered at me.

"Double Scotch," I said. "Plain water."

The Scotch came up. The fellow took my dollar. I downed the drink and swung around to see more of Merle Davis. The young G.I. was sliding off his stool. I crooked a finger at him. He came over.

"I'll buy," I said.

"Suits me." He sat down beside me, ordered Bourbon. His smile was rueful. "Just gave Merle the last of my day's wages."

"Pearl diving?" I asked.

"How'd you know?"

"Your hands show it," I said. "Work here?"

He nodded.

I saw the woman in the green dress then, the one who had been in the sedan that had passed Maxine and me. There was no mistaking that color. It was on a blonde, so slim as to be thin. She slipped onto a stool beside a man in a new brown suit, a new shirt and a new tie. I saw the ruptured duck in his lapel and figured he wasn't much farther out of the Service than the lad next to me. The guy was short and heavy. His face was square. He had a square mouth and square eyes.

I said to the young fellow:

"My name's Blade—Nick Blade."

"Mine's Tommy Larson. Here's happiness."

He upped the jigger, chased the drink with water. It seemed like a good time to start asking questions about the joint. Maybe he knew the blonde in the green dress. Maybe he could tell me about the sultry dish who'd been watching Merle Davis when I'd come in.

Before I could start my pump working he rose.

"I'm goin' to ask old Tom Gray for credit," he said.

Disappointed, I got up to join Maxine at the other end of the bar. I looked that way. She wasn't there. My eyes were searching for the babe in the green dress and her squarish boy friend when the lights went out.

I got to my feet as some dame laughed and another let out a scream.

"What the devil?" some guy hollered.

I backed against the bar.

"Turn 'em on!" a woman cried.

Anything can happen in a gambling casino when lights go out. There's silver stacked a foot high on the tables, boxes stuffed with bills underneath them. I

sent my hand after the butt of the .38 automatic in my shoulder holster.

There was more rustling and stirring in the big room. Feet going by hard and feet going by softly. I didn't like it. A door slammed. The lights stuttered a couple of times and came on.

I heard sighs of relief. I focused first on the crap and roulette tables. The money was still stacked high, the tablemen leaning over it to protect it. Then I glanced along the bar. The woman in green was back on her stool sipping a drink while the square man used his arms to talk. Maxine was walking toward the bar, her back to the blackjack table.

My glance went to the table as my eyes adjusted themselves to the light. I guess I was the first to see it, of all the people who were in the place, even those who were waiting for Merle Davis to resume dealing. He was over his money, as if to shield it. Then, as he toppled, I could see it, smooth and silver—the knife handle sticking out of his back.

Players began popping off their stools, stunned. I moved forward, looking everywhere at once. Tommy Larson, the young fellow for whom I'd bought the drink was at my side, his eyes wide.

Somebody wailed. I turned. Maxine Davis was standing by the bar looking as if she'd just been struck by a snake—cold, like a statue. Her hand went to her mouth and the scream stopped.

I was beside the body now. The knife had a crest on it. It was the Franz Josef knife. It was in just the right place to get the heart.

I glanced down at the shirt front.

The golden dog was gone.

"Stand where you are or get drilled!"

I turned half around and saw a guy standing in the front door. He was the one Maxine had been talking to—the fiftyish man with the pop eyes. Those eyes weren't kidding. Below the round face, pale under the tan, and the set lips and jaw was a round body, the upper part encased by a gray woolen shirt, checked by darker black lines. From one of the pockets hung a tobacco sack disc. The ample, solid girth was held in by a heavy belt with burned design and a big silver buckle. His pants were tight and ended cuffless over high-heeled boots.

The thing that persuaded me to lay off any idea I had of investigating, was the backing for his command—a long-bar-



I saw two deputies step out into the road and hold up their hands, and then I was double-clutching and pounding down the road

reled .38 Colt with a custom grip. The grip was worn, which gave me the idea with that big hunk of beef aiming it, it could stop a coyote at a hundred yards. His eyes were dead.

He was looking at the bartender now and roaring:

"Larry, we got a killer here! Nobody leaves this place. Take my car. Go to the sheriff's sub-station. Bring Mulligan, Cowan, Anderson—"

I heard the drip, drip of blood and eyed the floor. I shot a fast glance at the big guy with the gat, bent over and picked up a bit of linen I saw, sank it into my trousers pocket, and apparently nobody saw me.

The bartender caught the keys which arched from the big fellow's left hand. He ducked under the bar's entry panel and went out a door I hadn't seen before. I wrote that down in my mind. At the same time I felt more icy fingers on my spine. If the handkerchief I'd picked up had been used to protect my prints and if the blade had been driven in by the heel of the handle I was a sunk duck. As an ex-officer of the OSS and a private dick, my fingerprints were about as secret as a movie star's divorce.

I started thinking in high gear. There must've been two in on it—one to pull the master switch, the other to bury that knife so expertly.

And how had the knife traveled from the coffee table in Maxine Davis' living room to Merle Davis' body?

I ran through a sequence—the scent I'd sniffed on Maxine—Maxine telling me I was tired and should go to a hotel—Maxine making a quick decision and going back after that handkerchief when she saw she couldn't shake me loose.

My hand went into my pocket. It came out, the handkerchief balled in my palm. I took a whiff. The smell brought back a memory of Maxine's soft, midnight hair. The same perfume, all right.

Maxine was at the bar now, her head buried in her arms. The old gent who ran the roulette table—the one young Larson had called Tom Gray—was trying to talk her into a drink.

Larson was still standing near me. The slim number in green was stiff on her bar stool, staring either at Merle Davis' body or at nothing—I couldn't tell which. The squarish guy with her had her hand in a death grip. He was white and staring, too. It was as if they

were seeing something they couldn't believe.

That's a good act, I thought suddenly, but not good enough. There's more to it than just seeing a dead man. They knew Merle Davis.

She pulled her hand away. I saw the two rings—the diamond solitaire and the gold band on the third finger.

The cold gray eyes of the square, squat man slitted.

"I'd hate to cross that guy," I thought.

Somebody tried to get into the front from outside and big Mike swung around.

"Beat it!" he snapped, and slammed the door. That made everybody jump—and broke the chill silence of death.

CHAPTER III

Accusing Prints

QUESTIONS that I wanted to ask were crackling in my mind like popping corn. But time was running through the hour glass. I had to get out of here—but fast. It had been minutes since I'd heard the bartender start that engine outside.

I didn't know how far away the sheriff's sub-station was, or how long it would take the deputies to get here. I did know that I was off my home grounds, and that my fingerprints were on that knife. I could offer as my only reason for being here the fact that the dead man had sent for me.

People were shifting around now. One man with a .38, even if he was big, couldn't cover at least forty people, and a lot of them who apparently know him pretty well seemed to be sure he wasn't trigger-happy, anyway. A red-faced fellow, wearing the tin hat of a dam worker, blustered:

"See here, Mike, lay off. We couldn't all have knifed him."

Somebody pounded a glass on the bar.

"I want a drink!" a hiccupy dame who overflowed her stool demanded. "How I need a drink!"

Tommy Larson's drawl came from beside me.

"That's Gina. She deals down at Railway Pass, then comes up here and blows her week's pay."

"Who's the square guy with the dame in the green dress?" I asked.

"They've been around a lot the last few days, but I don't know their names."

"Who's the guy with the rod?" I tried again.

"Brown—Mike Brown. He and Larry Miller, the bartender, own the joint. Old Tom Gray, playing nursemaid to Maxine over there, has the casino concession."

I tightened up like a guy about to throw a punch. I'd heard the distant wail of a siren. I had to get out before they came in and threw the works at me.

Maxine had faced around halfway now, and her right arm was holding up her head. Something in her face had died. Her features were a white mask. She looked like a figure in a wax museum. No guilt. No despair. Nothing.

Well, it was now or never, and as much as I'd have liked to work this crowd over—Maxine, the dealers, Miller and Brown, the gal in green and her blunt husband and all the rest—I knew it was going time.

I walked up to the menacing metal hole in front of Mike Brown.

"I'm going for my hip pocket to show you something—not a gun," I said. "Don't blast me."

I came out with my wallet, flipped it open and held out a badge. It read "Deputy Sheriff." Somehow my finger got over "Los Angeles County."

"I don't know you," Brown replied.

"I'm from up Mesquite way," I told him. "I've done a lot of homicide work. You've got to go fast on a case like this. I'd like a quick gander at that master switch."

"It's outside."

"I know it," I lied. "Just let me look, will you? I've got a hot hunch."

Brown hesitated, eyed me carefully, then crooked a finger at young Larson.

"This man's a deputy sheriff," he said. "Show him the master switch, Tommy."

"Yes, sir."

"Then have him come back to work with the boys from down below."

"Yes, sir."

Larson led the way. I followed fast on his heels, my eyes looking all around. I saw the piece of thread. It was brown like the floor. I scooped it up, pulled it with my fingers. I'd got it with only a slight bend of the knees.

The ex-G.I. opened the door, went

down some steps. We were outside the main building. Ahead of us was a big shack in which the Diesel which ran the lights drummed. He pointed to a box on the wall.

"That's it," he said.

It was just opposite the doorway.

I bent over swiftly, muttering something that sounded like, "What's this?" Larson bent over, too. His jaw was just right. My fist traveled less than a foot, and I used the leverage of my rise to clip him on the jaw. He sprawled. I stepped over his body.

"Sorry," I muttered. He was a nice kid. I hated to do it.

THE sirens were talking louder now, saying the boys were coming closer. I darted around the building.

I had no trouble finding the sedan that had passed Maxine and me. It had a California license plate, 3C-81-27. The name on the white slip on the steering wheel was Harris J. Traylock. I memorized a South Hoover street address, ran to my own car, got in and let it roll silently backward down the slope away from the club, then stepped on the starter.

I had to drive fast. I could see the red eye of the sheriff's car coming at me out of the night. My own lights were out.

Half a mile from the Estrella Club I found an opening in the brush and mesquite. I ploughed into it, and parked so my car was behind a clump, yet I could see the road.

I lit a cigarette and wished I had a shot of Scotch.

There were two cars, and they went by screaming like low-flying pursuit planes, showing their red lights. The baleful shrieks died to moans as they bobbed into the Estrella Club.

Half a pack of cigarettes later they came back, red lights hot again, sirens putting coyotes to shame. I started seeing the Franz Josef knife again. I was seeing it being brought to the sheriff's office, being dusted and photographed. I decided that one of the troubles with my job was that too many law enforcement officers had been through the FBI academy. The cars blurred by and I couldn't see what else they might have beside the knife.

The sedan came along about five minutes later. It rolled by, heading for Las

Verdes. I took my time starting. There were no important turnoffs until the driver reached Hendricks, miles down the straight highway. As I jockeyed the coupe onto the oiled surface, the sedan's tail-lights burned tiny red holes in the night.

I couldn't mistake that car. It belonged to the square, squat man and his thin wife, Mr. and Mrs. Harris J. Traylock.

By the time it had reached the Carleton intersection I was pretty close behind it. Traylock gunned it up Tremont street for about five blocks, slowed suddenly, swung across the wide thoroughfare and turned into an auto court with a big lavender neon sign proclaiming "Mesquite Motel." Beneath the sign was smaller, welcoming lettering which read "Vacancy."

I pulled up beyond the auto court entrance, doubled back, running on the balls of my feet. The court was built in two sections, facing each other, and the space between was covered with lawn, shrubs and trees. I concealed myself in the greenery as I advanced. Traylock had parked and was turning the key in the sedan door. Mrs. Traylock was standing in front of one of the rooms. Neither looked too steady.

I could see the numbers on the first two doors—Two and Four. The Traylock woman was at the seventh door, which would make it Fourteen. I waited for a while to be sure they went inside. I wondered how much of a working over the deputies had given them, if any, and if they'd been told to stick around until the killing of Davis was cleared up. But I was pretty sure they were pegged to their spot.

Traylock got Number Fourteen open and they stepped in, closed the door after them.

I ducked for my car, drove fast up Tremont. I hit Highway 81, and headed out through North Las Verdes toward the red, white and green lights that marked McLaren Field. I gave the coupe everything it had, shot into the civilian entrance to the airlines office and waiting room, skidded to a halt in the parking area. I vaulted out and went inside.

A sleepy guy in a blue-gray uniform and a cap cocked on one side of his curly head was behind the Trans Globe Airlines counter. He eyed me with some

curiosity as I went up to him. I didn't blame him. I knew I was beginning to look like a bum.

"You've a Flight Five at five-forty?" I asked.

"That's right."

"I'd like to see the list of those getting on here."

His face got downright inhospitable.

"Sorry—that's confidential."

I pulled out my wallet, showed my badge.

The fellow swallowed his surprise with a kind of "Oh!"

"Fugitives," I said, trying to sound cryptic. "I'm working on the case out of L.A." I grinned at him.

"We don't want any trouble," he said.

"Tell me who's boarding her here and I'll try to make the pinch before they get to the field."

"That's a deal."

HE fumbled through some papers, produced one, started reading. The first was a Janice Field. Next a Homer P. Canfield. Then:

"Harris J. Traylock. Mrs. Harris J. Traylock."

I tried to make my nod careless as I said, "Go on." Then a thought hit me. "They'd have to give their right names, wouldn't they, if they're traveling on a passport?"

"That's right. You can't get away with an alias on a passport. Not when you have to show a birth certificate."

"Go on."

"Father J. Vincent Moran. Lawrence Grayson. Deborah Gaynor. Merle W. Davis. That's all, sir."

I liked that "sir." I had the fatuous feeling that my personality had triumphed over my looks.

"What about destinations?" I asked.

"All to New York except Canfield. He's for Chicago."

"No foreign?"

"I wouldn't know about that. The day shift handles through bookings on the superliner."

"But it makes overseas connections?"

"It's the only plane out of here that does. An overseas flight leaves LaGuardia forty-five minutes after it lands."

"That's all I want to know."

"Remember your promise about arrests, sir. We've built a reputation carrying prominent people—business ex-

ecutives, movie stars, even congressmen."

"Congressmen are bad enough," I replied. "I'll do my best."

I started out of the waiting room. Then I swung back.

"You can cancel Merle W. Davis," I said. "He won't show."

"Is that definite?"

"Definite."

I drove back through the twenty-four-hour city that teemed with every kind of life and lights even though clock hands were leaning against the dawn. Tremont Street looked like the main stem of any ordinary city at nine o'clock at night, when the first show gets out. The Cactus Club, the Silver Nugget, the El Domino were garish, rococo and jammed with suckers trying to get to tables to drop their dough.

But that was not for me.

I angled into that mediocre, sleeping maze, Longridge. When I finally spotted the Davis house the front porch light was on, just as Maxine had left it. I kept driving, parked on a side street a block away and walked back.

I went completely around the house. The windows were all closed, and locked. Evidently, just as I had figured, Maxine Davis was still being worked over by the deputies. She was the only one they could tag because they didn't know as much as I did, even about the Traylocks, which wasn't much. She was the only one they could tie to Davis. At the same time, my prints on the knife would spring her.

I took out a knife, opened a long, curved, hooked blade. I found a French window, slipped the blade between the screen and sash, felt the hook and pushed it out of its eye. Then I folded back that blade, turned out a straight one. I pulled out the screen, inserted the blade between the two sashes halfway up. It struck metal and I lifted. The catch went up and the left window swung open. I crawled inside, pulled in the screen and locked it, closed the window and set the catch.

I made for the bottle of Scotch, using a small, flat flashlight.

I got a shot, then went from room to room. The place was empty. I worked over the drawers, suitcases, cupboards, medicine cabinet and even looked under all the rugs. I didn't find anything that got me anywhere. I went back into the

living room, had another drink, lay down on the divan, and went to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

Mutual Accusation

FOOTSTEPS on the porch and the scrape of a key across the heavy lock on the front door rang the alarm clock I'd set in my brain. I rolled off the divan onto my hands and knees, crawled around the far end of it where I couldn't be seen and waited.

I heard the creak of the door opening and a voice, heavily masculine saying: "You'll stay close to home, Mrs. Davis. We'll need you at any time."

"I understand," Maxine's weary voice replied. "I'll be here if you want me."

The lights clicked on.

"I could come in—stay on guard," the man's voice added. "We don't know what his motive was. He might be after you, too. He's dangerous."

He was talking about me and I could feel the heat coming on.

"That won't be necessary." Maxine's voice was cold, sharp, final.

"Very well, ma'am."

I couldn't help smiling at the disappointment in the guy's voice.

"Sorry, old man," I thought. "I can't say as I blame you for taking it hard, but I'll mark down a try."

Heavy feet walked off the porch and a gruff, "Good night," came from the front yard. Maxine didn't answer. I heard the door close behind her, heard the chain lock go into place. I pulled myself erect. She was standing with her back to the door, her head down, her body sagging, her fists clenched. But I didn't waste any pity on her.

"Hello, Maxine!" I said.

She looked up and opened her mouth as if to scream. I covered the ten feet in two leaps and my hand clapped over her lips. My arm went around her waist.

"Take it easy!" I snapped. "You're up to your neck as far as I am in this. I'm not going to hurt you. If I let you go, will you keep quiet?"

She nodded, anger replacing fear in her eyes. Her hands came up, her long fingernails like claws on the ends of her

fingers. I took my hand and arm away. Her body was hard now, her eyes smoky.

"How did you get in here?" she asked.

"Window," I replied. "Spilled your insides, didn't you?"

"I told them what I knew."

"What was that?"

"That you showed up here with a phony telegram. That you went with me to the Estrella Club. That the lights went out and while the place was dark somebody stuck the knife Merle gave me into his back."

"Did you directly accuse me?"

"Yes."

"That's just fine. That telegram is on the up and up. Check it at Western Union if you want. But you won't believe me. Of course, they've learned the rest—how I popped young Tommy Larson and took a powder? I suppose they pulled prints from the knife and then sent to L.A. for mine after you told them my name and business."

Her nod was cold.

"Nobody could've taken that knife to the Estrella Club but you. You killed my husband."

"Sure," I drawled. "After fifteen years in my racket I deliberately leave my fingerprints on a murder knife."

I let that sink in. Then I let her have it.

"My story," I said, "is as good as yours. I came here at the request of and in the pay of your husband. You had plenty on your mind when I first saw you. He was going to leave you. You were jealous. You first tried to get rid of me because I was cluttering up your plan to kill him. Then, after you saw me playing with the Franz Josef knife, you realize that I was a perfect set-up. You went back into the house and not only got the handkerchief but the knife. You took it to the Estrella Club in that big black bag of yours. If you killed him there, you'd be one of many suspects. If you bumped him at home, you'd be the only one."

She was still holding the purse in her hand and I pointed to it.

"You pulled the master switch, and I know how you managed it. You rammed the knife in your husband's back, taking care not to blur my prints. It was a perfect plant."

As I threw my story at her, her eyes became wider and wider.

"Lies!" she hissed. "All lies!"

THOUGHT of the cat on the fence again. I reached into my pocket and pulled out her handkerchief. She lunged at it and I jerked it behind my back.

"Where'd you get that?" she demanded.

"I picked it up five feet from your husband's body, where you dropped it after knifing him."

She looked wild now, like an animal caged for the first time.

"Who are Mr. and Mrs. Harris J. Traylock?" I shot at her.

"I—I don't know them," she stammered.

"Come clean," I growled. "They're the ones who passed us in the sedan, the ones you had me pull over to let by above Hendricks. She had on a green dress. They were both in the club tonight. When they saw the knife sticking out of Merle's back they took it like anything but strangers."

"I don't know them, I tell you!" she protested. "Why in the devil don't you get out of here and leave me alone?"

I shot wild.

"Merle was leaving you for that lush blond dame in the slinky black dress who took out from the blackjack table when you and I came into the Estrella," I said, as if I knew.

"Not Deborah Gaynor—" she began, but caught herself and swallowed.

"Thanks," I said. "You've saved me from having to dig up her name."

At the same time my mind ran down the passenger list of that airplane. There had been a Deborah Gaynor on it. I'd made a nice guess when I'd stumbled onto that one.

"Was this Gaynor number eloping with your husband?" I asked.

"I don't know."

That was as far as I would get on that track. I knew it.

"What did the deputies do when they got my prints off the knife?" I asked.

"They tele—what do you call it?"

"Teletyped," I furnished.

"Teletyped Washington. They phoned L.A. They told L.A. to send your prints up by special car."

"How long ago?"

"More than an hour."

I calculated fast. That would bring the prints in within five hours from now. That was bad, very bad. The only good thing about it would be the wire from Washington. Those FBI boys were

thorough. They filed everything they knew. Well, my history wouldn't hurt me. There was that little job I'd pulled at Teheran and the other at Malta. Both good, with medals to prove it.

But history couldn't take care of a murder rap.

I got goose pimples, thinking about how close they were on my heels.

"Look, Maxine," I said, putting compromise in my voice. "Let's get straight on this. Your husband hired me to do a job. I guess he wanted protection from somebody—maybe you. For some reason, he had to get on Flight Five. I never had a chance to help him while he was alive. Things happened too fast. But I *am* going to find out who killed him."

She looked bewildered.

"You're staying on the job, with the deputies looking for you?" she asked.

"It won't be the first time. I charge off my time at fifty bucks a day, plus expenses. I'll stick around until your husband's got his money's worth."

While I was talking I set myself. My hand shot out and grabbed her right wrist. My left hand caught the purse as I twisted.

"What—are—you doing?" she gasped, her face a caricature with pain.

"Looking for the golden dog," I replied.

I dumped the contents on the floor—that was the quickest way. I bent over the assortment of junk. What I saw looked like a notion store—bobby pins, lipstick, rouge, powder puff, mirror, all kinds of stuff. The golden dog wasn't there. I stood up.

"Okay," I told her. "We're going to do a little strip tease."

Wrath twisted her face.

"You cheap rat!" she snapped. "You're not going to get away with this!"

I slapped her—hard. She shut up and her hand went to the crimson blotch on her cheek.

"Want more?" I asked.

She shook her head. I'd scared her plenty.

I pointed to the bedroom door.

"Get behind it," I ordered.

"Shoes first," I told her.

She kicked them out. I picked them up, looked at the heels, tapped them to see that they were solid. They were.

"Slacks."

She passed them out. I felt them carefully from top to bottom. I called for one garment after another, worked them all over, even to the pads in the shoulders of the chartreuse jacket. Then I gathered up the pile and tossed it into the bedroom.

"Okay," I told her. "Put 'em on."

While she was doing that I went to the telephone box, pulled out the screw driver blade of my knife and removed the little cover. I took out a wire and shoved it in my pocket to be on the safe side. I put the cover back on, knowing she wouldn't talk to the sheriff's office or any place else until a repairman dropped by.

I was sitting on the divan downing a shot when she came out fully dressed. She glared at me.

"I've got some money," she said. "If you'll lay off and get out of the state I'll give you as much as Merle did."

I told her what I thought about that with a look.

"Where's your husband's stuff?" I demanded.

"The cops are holding it. They said they'd bring it over today."

"Fine," I said. I got up. "I'm going now. Get some sleep—if your conscience'll let you."

I went to the door, looked back over my shoulder. Her glance was already contemplating the telephone.

I just smiled at her. It was not a nice smile.

When I walked out the front door, the sky was pink and orange in the east. I felt as if I couldn't drag my legs to the car, but I made it.

I drove to Carleton, turned into Tremont and headed for the lights that were fading against the morning sky. Far away I heard the mournful wail of an engine whistle. I glanced off to the right. A passenger train, looking like a jeweled snake, crawled across the desert under a smoke plume, heading east.

I drove to the Mesquite Motel, turned into the next side street, and parked. I got my bag, locked the car door. Anyway, it wouldn't give me away—for a

SHE did. I set it half open, so if she tried ducking anything the wrong way I could see her do it through the crack between door and jamb.

while. Its description and license number would have to come from L.A. I walked back to Tremont, turned right, went to the motel office and jabbed a button under a sign, "Night Bell."

After I'd waited a while the door was opened by a stooped man with a tousled fringe of gray hair and half-lidded eyes. He wore a pajama coat, pants that weren't zippered, and run-over bedroom slippers.

"Room?" he asked.

I felt like telling him I'd just dropped by to pick a bouquet of hyacinths, but didn't. I was too tired to do anything but nod. He opened the door wide and I stepped inside. He pointed to a register on the desk. I scrawled, ignoring the street address and license number of my coupe:

Timothy Oakes, Palo Alto

"No car?" the old fellow asked as he peered near-sightedly at the entry I'd made.

I remembered the train.

"Just came in on that eastbound rattler."

That would give me an alibi if the deputies and cops were putting the bee on the hotels and auto courts.

"That's right," the fellow said. "Limited jest come through."

He looked at a board half covered with keys.

"I'd like either Twelve or Sixteen," I said anxiously.

The old man turned and stared at me.

"I've stopped here before," I pressed. "I'd like either—for sentimental reasons." I grinned and winked.

"You ain't the first one," he said, holding out a key. "Sixteen's took, but you can have Twelve."

He said it would be four dollars and I paid.

"You go outside and turn to the right—" he began.

"I remember, pop," I told him.

I dragged myself down the covered veranda and on to Twelve. Traylock's sedan still stood in front of Number Fourteen. I unlocked my door and went inside. I put my bag on the floor, set the alarm clock in my head to ring when there were sounds in the next room, and threw myself on one of the twin beds, clothes and all.

CHAPTER V

Strip Tease

IT rang all right. I came back to life listening to movements and voices in Fourteen. I sat bolt upright, straining hard, using my tongue in a hopeless effort to get the taste of used Scotch out of my mouth.

I couldn't catch any words. I looked at the wall, built of heavy construction brick, and cursed the shortages which had made this type of building necessary.

Not only could I catch only a low jumble, but it was hard even to distinguish between Mrs. Traylock's contralto and her husband's tenor. I listened impatiently to the faint sounds of running water, and all the other depressing noises made by people getting ready to face the world for another day.

Minutes dragged by.

Finally, they finished dressing. I heard them walk across the floor. I went to the window and peered through a gap in the Venetian blinds. I watched them cross the veranda, get into the sedan and slam the door. I sighed with the same relief a guy feels when his in-laws leave for home.

They carried no baggage. That meant they were probably going out for breakfast. So the sheriff's office had probably advised them to stick around Las Vegas until the Davis case was cleaned up.

They were both the worse for wear. It must have been a rough night all around. Traylock drove down the drive, and cut into the traffic. I went back to bed.

I felt a lot better after a few hours' sleep. I got off the bed, stretched, straightened out my clothes as best I could and went outside. I looked at my wrist-watch. It was nearly ten o'clock, later than I'd thought. I looked along the row of rooms on the opposite side of the court, saw the basket piled high with dirty linen, and one of those things with wheels on it that hold everything from fresh soap to a vacuum cleaner. That meant the maid was inside.

I hiked across the court, removing a

dollar from my pocket. I looked into the room, directly at an ample posterior, and coughed.

The woman turned on her knees, looked up. She was a blowzy, middle-aged person. I held out the dollar.

"I'm in Fourteen," I said. My wife and I had breakfast, and she went on a little shopping tour—with our key."

The woman took the dollar, tucked it into her apron pocket, clucking sympathetically.

"Ain't that like a woman!" she exclaimed.

She walked across the court with me at her heels and opened Fourteen with a pass key. I thanked her and went inside as if I owned the place.

I worked fast, from the inside of military brushes with detachable tops to toothpaste tubes and the water trap behind the commode. The first thing I found were two passports tucked in the side pocket of a woman's traveling bag. She was Linda Traylock, her passports said. The passports were for Germany and Austria. He was thirty-one. She was twenty-four.

"That ties that," I said to myself. "Davis, Deborah Gaynor, and the Traylocks were taking the same plane and the passports show they were going to about the same place."

I kept on prowling. Luckily, they were traveling light for the air trip, and there wasn't too much to go through. In the big masculine bag I found two worn packs of cards carefully wrapped in tissue paper. I took out one pack and looked at it. I ran my finger along the edges. Then I held each pasteboard up to the light from the window, one by one.

Pretty soon I saw that all the face cards had been shaved—a stunt used by a crooked poker player so he'll know

what the other guy is holding. The jacks, queens, kings and aces had all been trimmed differently, so whoever used them could tell what and how many face cards his opponents held.

"I'd hate to sit in that game," I told myself, and was shocked to find I was speaking out loud. In my business, it's time to worry when you start talking to yourself.

I got out the second pack. I dealt a few cards onto the counterpane of the bed. They looked and felt all right. I tossed the next hand faces down—and got the answers. All of the face cards had been daubed, and the daubs weren't hard to see. That would be nice for blackjack if you had the skill to deal seconds or thirds or from the bottom.

I stacked the cards, wrapped both packs in the tissue paper just as they had been and put them back exactly where I had found them. I kept on going, wondering about the cards, and looking for the golden dog.

I WAS bending over the big bag and concentrating. The first tip-off came when the room became lighter as the door opened. I straightened up and started to swing around, but the nudge of metal in my back made me change my mind.

I heard Traylock's tenor: "Up with them!" Then: "Linda, call the cops!"

My hands started on their way, but at the halfway point I sent my left snaking across my back. My fingers closed on the cartridge chamber, keeping it from revolving. I pivoted and twisted his wrist.

His face went white with pain. His hand gave up the gun. It was a .38 Service Colt's. I turned it on him. He stood there, square-cornered as a box of break-

[Turn page]

HEADACHE

UPSET
STOMACH

JUMPY
NERVES



RELIEF!

THANKS TO FAMOUS
BROMO-SELTZER

Millions turn to Bromo-Seltzer to relieve ordinary headache three ways. It's famous for giving fast, pleasant help. Caution! Use only as directed. Get Bromo-Seltzer at your drugstore fountain or counter today. A product of Emerson Drug Co. since 1887.



fast food and plenty wrathly. I saw the quick look he gave his wife, and slammed down my right hand on the telephone an instant before she reached it.

Traylock looked as if he wanted to kill me with his bare hands. He was clutching his wrist as if it ached. I imagined it did.

Linda Traylock opened her mouth. "You're going to scream yourself right out of this world," I told her. She closed it.

I looked at the square man again.

"Don't ever," I advised, in a fatherly way, "stick a gun into a man's back. He's apt to do what I did. Keep back about a yard, out of the way of his arms."

"Thanks," he said, licking his dry lips, but he didn't sound grateful.

"Now, sit down," I said. "Right on the bed."

I walked to the door to see that it was shut tightly. Both of them sat down, as if fascinated by the .38.

"I just dropped in," I said, "to pick up the golden dog."

Harris J. Traylock leaned forward, doing a swell job of looking dumfounded.

"Golden dog?" he repeated.

"That's right. Merle Davis wore it on a chain that ran between his shirt pockets. Want me to sketch it?"

I watched that one land like a blitz bomb.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Traylock licked his lips again.

"You didn't know Merle Davis?"

"No."

I saw them look at each other. I could have sworn there was warning in Traylock's eyes. Those eyes said, pretty plainly, "Keep your mouth shut."

"I'll bet you didn't remember to cancel your reservations," I said.

They stayered dummed up. Funny lights danced in Traylock's eyes.

"The airlines are busy these days," I monologued. "They haven't much use for no-shows. If you aren't going to use your seats it's only polite to tell them so."

They still gave fine imitations of a couple of characters from Madame Tussaud's.

"Talkative, eh?" I went on. "Well, I can still ask questions. Just why were you going to Australia?"

Linda Traylock suddenly came to life.

"You—you were at the Estrella Club last night, when that Mr. Davis was murdered?" she asked me.

"Sure he was there," Traylock told her. "He's the one who killed Davis. He slugged that Larson fellow and blew. The sheriff's office and the cops are after him. That's why I wanted you to call them."

"Now that we're better acquainted," I said, "I'll try again. Why were you going overseas?"

"What's it to you?" Traylock demanded.

"I suppose you're going to kill us, too," his wife blurted, "so you might as well have the truth. We were going on a vacation. First, Harry was all mixed up in the war and then he finally came home and we got married, but he had a lot of business and we had no time for a honeymoon. We—"

"Shut up!" snapped Traylock.

Her face flushed as if she had been slapped as she turned to him angrily.

"Don't you tell me to shut up!" She looked at me. "This is honest and true, and it doesn't hurt anyone. I was going to tell you, Mr. —"

"Oakes," I prompted.

"Blade," Traylock spat. "Nick Blade, a private dick from L.A."

"As I was saying, Mr. Oakes, or Blade, or whatever it is," Linda hurried on, "you've got no reason to kill us because all we want is a little rest. We haven't had a honeymoon, and we've saved some money for it, and Harry's going to show me all the places where he's been and fought and—well, that all."

TRAYLOCK brightened a little bit, as if his wife's outburst was not what he had thought it was going to be at all.

"Sure," he added, in a tone of hearty approval. "We had to wait for reservations. We like this place. So we came up here for a while until we got them. You know, you don't go a third of the way around the world these days on a moment's notice. So we're having fun in the sun. Of course, I like to gamble now and then, and it looked like a good chance."

"With crooked cards?" I shot at him.

He paled again. I watched him look down at his feet. When he lifted his face it was mottled and sickly.

"I found the cards," I said. "Want to explain 'em?"

"There's nothing to explain."

"Have it your way." I thought a minute. "Does your fun include driving by Merle Davis' house every night?"

I thought he was coming after me then, even into the muzzle of the gun. His hands were clenching and unclenching. He got to his feet. His wife rose, too.

"Now that you're up, Mrs. Traylock," I said, "go into the bathroom." I backed up, reached behind me and took the key out of the door.

"See here—" she started to protest.

"You're not going to get away with this!" her husband snarled.

I pointed to the .38 in my hand. "This says I do," I told him. I turned to her. "Get in the bathroom before I beat your husband into a hamburger."

Fear whitened her face and she scurried like a rat. I told her to leave the door partly open. I didn't want her going out the window.

"One peep," I called to her, "and you're a widow. Strip and throw your clothes out here." I turned to Traylock.

"Now," I said, "you get busy, too." I held the gun flat in my hand and he got the idea that I would lay it alongside his head if he didn't obey. He did, and I went through his clothes fast, listening for any sounds from the bathroom, just in case his wife decided to leave.

I found the tickets in his wallet. The destination read: "Innsbruck." There was some folding money, a couple of grand in travelers' checks, a letter of credit, and some other stuff that didn't at that time, mean anything to me.

I told him to get dressed, and told his wife the same thing after I'd gone over her garments. I tossed her clothes back, went through her purse. Nothing of any value to me there. She came out of the bathroom and I gave it a quick working over to see that she hadn't hidden anything.

"Sit on the bed again," I said.

"What the blazes are you looking for?" Traylock asked.

"That dog," I said. "The little golden dog."

I tried to make my voice sound unfrustrated.

Then I broke open the .38, took out the cartridges, dumped them in my pocket and tossed the empty revolver into the bathroom. I locked the door

and put the key into my pocket.

"Okay," I said. "Now call the cops. I'll see you in Innsbruck."

I was heading for the door as I spoke. The key was in the lock. I slammed the door after me and locked it. Then I ran to my room, grabbed my bag, raced along the veranda. I shot down the sidewalk, around the corner and hopped into my coupe.

I headed toward the Estrella Club. My mind was so much on the complete disappearance of the dog that I paid no attention to my driving. Where in the devil, I kept asking myself, was the thing?

Then I heard the siren's command, close behind. The coupe was pretty fast, but it wouldn't accelerate as fast as a cop's motorcycle. So I pulled over and the cop came alongside. This, I thought, was it. His face looked like that of a b'g, fat angry bug behind his colored glasses as he stamped on my running board. My right hand was going to my left armpit and I was looking for his gat when he demanded:

"Where ya think yer goin', bud?"

I tried to make with a grin.

"My wife," I said quickly, "is having a baby out at Rock City Hospital." I wondered if Rock City had a hospital.

"Your license says California," he said suspiciously. "What's she doin' havin' a baby here?"

"Is that against the law?" I parried. "I didn't know you needed a local license plate to have a kid."

"Don't get fresh."

"I'm sorry. The kid's premature."

The buglike face broke into a grin.

"I've had a couple myself, bud. Lemme see your driver's license."

I reached into my pocket, produced a wallet and flipped some transparent leaves. The cop eyed the license and the badge.

"Timothy Oakes, eh? Deputy sheriff, too. You ought to know better. The speed limit's twenty along here. You lawless apes from L.A. come up here and think you can get away with anything. Well, you can't, see? We're law abidin'."

I glanced back at half a mile of balloons, night clubs and casinos, thought of the side-street industry.

"Yes, sir," I said meekly.

"Okay." He banged his ticket book shut. "I hope it's a boy."

CHAPTER VI

Hunters and Hare

MY FOOT was jumping up and down on the clutch as I let it out. I watched the cop gun his cycle and take off in the opposite direction as I worried into second and high. I was glad that I'd taken time and trouble to get two licenses at two different California motor vehicle branches. I drove slowly to the city limits, letting the jangle wear off my nerves, then hit it up.

The cluster of roadside communities that fought feebly against the desert went by in a blur. Then I passed the big black buildings of the metals plant, pulled the long hill, the road a stretched ribbon on the comparatively flat terrain. I slowed at some distance from the Estrella Club, relieved to find there were no cars parked.

As I pulled onto the ramp I saw that the heavy front door was closed. I swung my car around for a fast getaway in case I needed it, went to a window, and peered inside for some signs of life.

Tommy Larson, the nice young guy I'd hated to clip on the jaw was swabbing the floor with a mop. I tapped on the window. He looked up, frowned, shook his head. I made violent motions with my hands, waving a five-dollar bill. Larson, still frowning, changed his mind and pointed to the back door out of which I'd gone the night before. I went around to it.

He opened up, and I saw that his jaw was swollen.

"I'm sorry I had to sock you," I said.

I held out the bill and he waved it away.

"That's all right, sir," he replied. "You were in a jam. I guess I'd done the same thing." He looked at my stubbled face and asked: "Aren't you takin' a chance, comin' out here, Mr. Blade? Those sheriffs—"

"What about them?"

"They're patrollin'. They're really lookin' for you, sir."

"Don't 'sir' me," I told him. "You're out of the Army."

"That's right. I keep forgettin'. Boy, am I behind in my work! Gettin' that blood off the floor and table was some job. How come you're here?"

"I want to look around."

Larson stood back and I went inside. I got behind the bar, found the Scotch bottle, poured a stiff drink and downed it. I could feel my scalp creep, and the tremor went down to my feet. I put a dollar in the half-open drawer of the empty cash register.

"That's for Mike Brown and Larry Miller," I said. "Honest Nick Blade, they call me."

Larson was leaning on his mop, watching me.

"Want a snort?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Too early in the mornin'."

"That's a Texas drawl," I said.

"You're pretty smart. I'm from Wink. You probably never heard of it."

"Oil town in west Texas," I said. I measured him. "Tommy," I asked, "you didn't find Davis' little dog, did you?"

He shook his head.

"Cleaned the rest rooms?"

"No, sir."

I went through both, emptying wastebaskets, going over the plumbing, the towel dispensers, and looking in water traps. I went out, feeling low.

"No luck, sir?"

I nodded and reminded him again about the "sir."

"I'm going to try a little experiment, Tommy," I said.

He looked at me, his expression puzzled, as I went out the back door. I pulled the long, strong brown thread from my pocket, found the loop on one end, slipped it over the handle of the master switch, ran it back into the room beneath the door.

"What're you doin'?" Larson asked.

"Watch," I answered.

I walked around the casino along the bar as far as the string would let me go, to the crap and roulette tables, to the bedraggled imitation leather lounge chairs, to the bar itself. Then I gave a slight tug.

The single light burning above the bar went out.

"That's darned clever!" Larson exclaimed. "You're proving that whoever did the killin'—"

"—pulled the string, jerked the master switch open and cut off the lights, dropped the string, probably accidentally in his or her excitement, then stabbed Davis."

LARSON'S eyes were shining.

"Say, you're a darned good detective—"

"There are times when I—and the cops—doubt it," I told him. "Everybody else thinks I'm a killer."

"I don't."

"Why?"

"You were standing right beside me all the time. I never heard you move an inch. I could see your cigarette glowing."

"Nice work," I said. "I wish you'd tell that to the sheriff's deqs."

"Who do you reckon did it?" Larson asked. "His wife and that Deborah Gaynor had a big beef here a couple of weeks ago."

"Davis was planning to take off with the Gaynor dish," I told him. "It looks bad for Maxine Davis."

"Jealousy, all right." He looked at his wrist-watch. "Say—you'd better get out of here. Mike Brown and Larry Miller are due from Rock City, where they live, at any time. Are you heeled?"

I said I was.

Then I asked him where he lived.

"In back. In a shack."

"Got running water?"

"Sure. Why?"

I ran my hand over the stubble on my chin.

"I've got to get rid of this. Got a razor?"

He hesitated. "Why—no. I've been using the one Mike Brown keeps here."

"Okay. I'll get my own."

I went to the coupe, came back with my bag. Larson showed me to the small, unpainted, ramshackle hut with tarpaper roof and sagging front door. Inside, there was just enough space for an iron bedstead, a stool and the wash basin.

"It isn't much, but help yourself," Larson said. "I've got to get movin' or Mike'll give thunder."

I looked around.

"You GI's are making out fine in the post war world," I said. "A dive like this is a great reward for saving democracy. Overseas?"

"Pacific."

"If Brown shows, come to the back door and whistle," I said.

He went away. I took the things I needed from my bag and went to work, shaving in cold water. I rinsed, wiped my face, felt better. I took a further look at Larson's mansion. Sunlight came

through the warped, shrunken clapboards. A barracks bag peeped from under disordered, shabby bedclothes.

I packed my bag and went out. I walked behind the shack. There stood what passed for a car. You've seen them. This was a broken down Model A Ford roadster with the paint peeling off, leaving rust. It was a faded green and it bore such roughly painted signs as "Engine Room," "Great Pick-up—2 Dames Per Block" and "Oh, For a Sail!"

I went to the rear door, looked in. Larson was mopping industriously. I asked him if the jalopy was his, and he said it was.

"Sometimes it runs and sometimes it doesn't," he told me. "Needs a lot of fixin', but I don't have time."

I reached into my pocket, pulled out a five and told him to take it. He did.

"You needn't do that, s—" He caught himself.

"You haven't seen me, Tommy," I told him.

"That's right."

He went on mopping. I walked to my car, tossed the bag onto the shelf behind the seat, climbed in and drove towards Las Verdes. I made it fast through the country, but got smart in city traffic and by the time I reached First and Tremont I was crawling. A kid on the corner, holding a bunch of newspapers, was shouting about the murder. I called to him, grabbed the sheet he held out, shifted with the lights and went north on Main Street. I turned left at the underpass, pushed on a cautious half-mile beyond the shambling west side Negro district, pulled up under a cottonwood tree and killed my engine. The sign on the tree trunk caught my eye. A hard-faced gent, maybe thirty, maybe thirty-five, looked out from under a Western hat with a pair of hard eyes. The caption read:

RE-ELECT DAN DAKE SHERIFF!

THE SIGN made me feel as if I had things crawling between my underwear and skin, but I looked at the newspaper anyway. What I saw jarred me down to the heels—a two-column picture of myself made at the time I broke that ski-jump murder. Over it was a caption:

SLEUTH SOUGHT

Underneath was the works—a com-

plete description of me and the car, including the license number, which must have come from the L.A. police.

I read the story fast.

It pinned the job on me, all right. The first paragraphs gave a vivid account of the killing of Merle Davis. Then it read:

Escaping from the Estrella Club, after knocking out Thomas Larson, an employee who sought to restrain him, was the suspected killer, Nicholas Blade, Los Angeles private detective, whom police and sheriff's officers are now seeking.

Sheriff Dan Dake said that Blade is probably still in the vicinity of Las Verdes, and all citizens are warned to be on the lookout for him. Dake said he could not have escaped from this locality, as blocks had been put on every highway leading from the city.

Dake said that Blade's fingerprints were found on the murder knife. He added that Los Angeles police were cooperating in the search and had supplied Blade's prints, taken at the time when he applied for his license as a private detective. Efforts are being made to tie Blade up to a notorious Los Angeles gambling ring now said to be operating in Las Verdes.

That last guess just about floored me.

There was a lot more, but in my nervous condition I didn't bother to read it. Instead, I looked down the highway. Far in the distance I saw a car pulled to the side of the road. I saw a convertible which had passed me being waved down by a couple of uniformed figures. Sheriff Dake wasn't kidding about his road block.

I reached back for my bag, put it on the seat beside me and opened it. I fished out a soft hat, one of those that could be crushed in packing, pushed the wrinkles out of it and slammed it on my head. Then I got out a pair of dark glasses and put them on. I pulled down the hat brim, thinking how hot the car was, with the newspaper describing it and giving the license number.

I remembered a parking lot which covered half a block at Second and Farrison. I started the engine, did a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn, sped between the unpainted shacks to the underpass. I came up on the other side, got the jitters waiting for the green light, but finally rolled into the parking lot.

I found a hole and pulled in. I left the keys in the car so when the sheriff's boys picked it up they wouldn't have to call an electrician or tow it. I didn't give a hang about them, but I did about the car. I began feeling like a wild

animal trapped in a coulee with hunters closing in.

I saw the parking attendant heading my way. I ducked to the street and hiked down Second Street until I came to a garage with a sign: "Drive-Yourself-Cars."

I went in, and a man in greasy overalls looked up at me.

"I want a car," I said.

I produced the license issued to Timothy Oakes. The fellow copied down some notes from it and asked for more identification. I remembered the Oakes cards I'd had printed. They showed I was salesman for an orange juice distributing firm.

"Okay," the fellow said, taking my deposit. "How's a Chevvy coupe?"

"Is it in good condition?" I asked.

"I've got a lot of calls to make."

"It's the smoothest job in the place."

"Okay."

A boy came in with newspapers under his arm and I got that crawling sensation. This time it was under my scalp, too. The boy laid down the paper, folded so the picture and headline were inside. My hand was ready in case the man picked it up, but he didn't. He took me to the car and I drove out of the garage.

I headed for the edge of town, found a hot dog stand. I could see the telephone through the windows with the book hanging beside it. I went inside. The waitress was reading the paper, but she had it opened in the middle. She didn't look up. I was so hungry by this time that I was ready to broil my own ribs.

I looked up Deborah Gaynor, and found "Deborah Gaynor Beauty Salon," and the address. I memorized it. I could smell the odor of hamburgers and I was just about drooling. But I barged out, got in the car, and drove to the blonde's beauty salon.

CHAPTER VII

Blonde in a Beauty Shop

WHEN I parked, I saw that the place was a reconverted residence. The front porch was now part of the salon. I went in.

A dame with three chins was getting her hair combed by a hennaed operator

in a white frock, while she read a movie magazine. A younger babe was having her face muddled by another white-frocked number. There was a doorway ahead and I kept on going.

In what had been the living room there was a desk, and behind the desk was Deborah, her seams bulging. She was older under the fluorescent lights. There were crow's feet at the corners of her eyes and hard lines around her mouth. She looked up and tightened up all at the same time. It was the tightness of recognizing a suspected killer.

I flicked back my coat so she could see the butt of my gun. Then I slipped into a chair beside her desk as she started to get up.

"Sit down!" I said. My voice had more than an invitation, in it.

She plopped. "What do you want?" she asked, looking at the doorway through which I'd just come, as if wishing one of her girls, or practically anyone, would pop in.

"I want you to be quiet and answer some questions. Why were you going to Innsbruck?"

"I wasn't. I—" Her hand went to her throat.

"The town is full of Deborah Gaynors," I said. "It's a very common name. They all knew Merle Davis. One of them decided to go along with him on a European trip."

I gave her credit for getting the point, which showed in her face.

"I was going," she said slowly. "Merle and I have known each other for a long time. He wasn't too happy at home." She shrugged. "It was just one of those things."

"To the devil with the Mann Act," I said, "and he was paying your way."

"Oh, no," she replied, her voice almost naive. "I was paying—for both of us. You see, he was a little short of cash, and he's such a sweet boy, and he promised he'd pay me back."

"When?" I asked.

"Very soon," she said, as if she didn't believe what she said, either.

I wasn't surprised. I had picked the guy as predatory the first time I'd looked at him. I didn't wonder at all why he would take this blowzy number and leave a beautiful dish like Maxine at home. But why the Austrian town of Innsbruck?

I got a quick flash. I thought of that

Army officer and his wife who had, according to reports, got their hands on about three million bucks worth of crown jewels. Maybe—

"Why was he going overseas?" I asked.

"He didn't say."

"You were just going along for the ride."

"That's right. I've always stayed here at home, and I saw my chance to see the world."

I believed her. She was at least ten years older than the fascinating Davis. She had fallen for him. She had money, saved from her beauty shop. I found myself feeling sorry for her. I felt sorrier when I saw that her eyes were swollen from crying.

"You had a fight with Maxine," I told her. "If you'd killed anyone, I think she'd be the one, unless Davis was doublecrossing you or had something you wanted. Do you think she stabbed Davis?"

Her eyes took fire.

"That witch would do anything. I think she would've murdered me that night if we hadn't been pulled apart."

My time was running out again. Those dames wouldn't stay out there making their customers beautiful forever.

I looked around the place. I couldn't search it with five dames around. I could have told Deborah to call the cops, but I didn't. She had looked at the telephone three times, and I knew she had thought of it herself.

I got up and backed toward the doorway. Then I swung around and went out past the other dames, sprinted for my car, and whipped away before Deborah Gaynor could get out and get a load of the license number.

My next stop was Longridge. I drove through side streets, fumbled around until I found the Davis house, and parked some distance away. The blinds were down when I neared the house, but I could see the rear wheels of a car beneath the closed garage doors. I pressed the doorbell and waited for the hollow peal to bring Maxine. I saw the movement in the corner of the window back of the Venetian blinds. I jabbed the bell again. You could feel Maxine behind the door.

I got my face close to the crack and said:

"Open up or I'll shoot the lock out!"

That did it. The door opened a crack. The chain wasn't on, and I pushed it the rest of the way. I stepped into the entryway. She backed up. She had on a quilted pink dressing gown, shaped to her figure, and pink mules. Her face didn't need to be made up to look like a mask. There was no emotion there. Her eyes were dry, and had been. She looked about as grief-stricken as she would have if she had lost a cobra.

I cased the place to be sure nobody was planted.

"You know Merle was taking Deborah Gaynor with him," I told her then. "That gives your motive. You were losing him, and you weren't going to let her have him."

She took a step backward, put her hand to her throat.

"My lawyer was here," she said. "He told me not to talk."

"Cops here, too?"

"In and out all day."

"That's cozy." I eyed her carefully. "I've got a theory," I said. "It might help you."

"You're a smart guy—pulling that stuff when you've got the rap tied to you."

"Did the sheriff's boys bring Merle's stuff back?"

"Yes."

"Okay. I want to see his army discharge."

She rose, went into the bedroom, came back with a paper in her hand. I took it. I saw, on the back, that Davis had been in the Second Infantry.

The actions in which he'd taken part were listed:

NORMANDY CAMPAIGN
NORTH FRANCE
RHINELAND
CENTRAL EUROPE

That didn't give me much. I jotted down the outfit, the names of the campaigns. While I was doing that Maxine came back with the bottle of Scotch, the Bourbon, ice, glasses. She put the tray on the coffee table. For a minute this puzzled me, and then it didn't.

For the first time I really became aware of her as my eyes roamed over her now smiling face, framed by soft, midnight hair, the soft skin of the long legs that somehow had escaped slightly from the long garment she wore, the small feet in the pink mules.

"She trying to make me feel this way," I thought. "It's an awfully dumb play after she's told me the law has been in and out all day."

I poured a shot, downed it, and got up. "Sit down," she said, still giving me that Mona Lisa smile. "Tell me about your theory."

"The telephone—is it working now?" I asked.

"They fixed it this morning."

I went to it, called Trans Globe Airlines.

"Are you booked solid on Flight Five?" I asked the man who answered.

Then I told him I wanted to know if Mr. and Mrs. Harris J. Traylock had reservations. He told me he couldn't give out that information and I got tough.

"I've driven fifty miles to see them off!" I snapped. "So you can't tell me who's getting on. Maybe it's against the rules to tell me who's *not* getting on."

I could almost hear him thinking that one over.

"That would be all right," he said.

"Okay. Are Mr. and Mrs. Harris J. Traylock *not* boarding the plane?"

"They are not."

"Thanks," I said. I thought I heard a faint chuckle as I hung up.

I took my hat from the coffee table.

"Thanks for the shot," I said.

As I went by her, her hand fell on my arm. I brushed it off.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I'm going to get the heat off myself," I said, "if I can."

I went down the street to the rented car, and drove away. I went by the Mesquite Motel slowly. The Traylock car wasn't there. After that, I kept to the less used streets, the outlying districts. Always, I was seeking that car. At two-hour intervals I dived into any place that looked as if I could get away with it and telephoned the motel. No, they hadn't come in yet. No, they hadn't turned in their key.

It got dark and I took more chances, driving by the clubs and casinos. I spotted the sedan just before midnight out on Highway 81—the Los Angeles strip. It was parked with a dozen other vehicles in front of the Last Chance, a neon-lighted combination cafe, night club and casino. I had a headache, and by this time I was ready to gnaw on my shoes.

I PARKED behind a tamarisk tree on the other side of the highway, lit one cigarette off another.

It was nearly one o'clock when they came out.

Traylock was liquored, weaving even under the balancing done by his wife. She looked none too steady herself. They got into the sedan with Traylock at the wheel. He backed jerkily, swung around, narrowly missing the bumper of another car, bucked blindly onto the highway and headed in toward the neon haze of the city. Traylock was having his troubles, staying on the right side of the white line and holding a steady pace.

At Carleton he angled right and surprised me. I thought he would be heading for the Mesquite Motel. I mumbled a curse at drunks who didn't want to go to bed. He angled right again on the Rock City Highway and developed a heavy foot. The sedan rolled faster and faster, swaying back and forth across the road.

Traylock swerved wide to pass a slower driver and I thought this was it. He nearly shot into the draw between the two strips of highway, but managed a two-wheel recovery that made me swallow hard. At Hendricks he weaved, but finally straightened into the two-lane highway, went up the long hill like a curious ant looking for food. I saw a cloud of dust as he hit the gravel at the Estrella Club. I pulled off the highway and doused my lights.

Traylock, with springs in his knees, wobbled into the place with his none-too-steady wife. The necklace of lights out to the highway blacked out while I waited. The lights inside went dim. It was closing time.

They came out with Mike Brown and Larry Miller, who were gesticulating. Brown and Miller finally helped them into the sedan. They stood looking after it as it rolled down the hill toward the railroad tracks and to Rock City or Bemis, depending on which highway you took.

Brown and Miller went back into the club. I started my engine, cut into the highway and caught up with the Traylock tail-lights in time to see them ignore the Bemis road. Ahead and up a hill, on the right, was a big barn of a place outlined in neon—Railway Inn. It loomed huge against the desert with all that

colored tubing around it and lit up an area as large as a city block.

Traylock turned in, swayed to a stop amid a litter of cars. He got out and his wife followed, grabbing his arm. I pulled well back into the mesquite with my lights out, backed around until my car was about fifty yards off the highway, facing it. It was where it couldn't be seen unless someone stumbled over it.

I put on my dark glasses, pulled my hat down over my eyes, and walked back into the lighted area. I looked around and saw nobody. Then I went inside, sniffing the odor of food that blew on a light draft from the kitchen. It was driving me crazy.

CHAPTER VIII

Lady in Distress

THE BAR, with a big mirror behind it, took up the whole left side, and along it were about half as many customers as it could accommodate. To the right about thirty men and women were busy at the gaming tables—blackjack and roulette. A scar-faced guy and a couple of quick-handed girls were pulling a green cover over the crap table.

I saw a room beyond and headed that way. A cowboy orchestra was heating up a number called "Cool Water." Through the wide-arched entrance I looked into the dimly lit room, thanking my luck that there wasn't much light. The place was about half-filled.

I saw Traylock and his wife doing a wobbly job of dancing. She seemed to be trying to break it up, but he hung onto her. My stomach was cursing me out by this time. I slipped into a far booth, unable to take it any more, and switched out the small light that illuminated it.

A fat brown-haired waitress with an invitation in her eyes that didn't have anything to do with the menu came up. She looked down at me, ran her hand over upswept, varnished hair.

"Double Scotch and a steak," I said.

"Too late, big boy. They're closing the kitchen. Settle for a sandwich."

My middle shrank a couple of inches.

"Club," I told her.

She wrote it down and went away.

I looked after her and got a jolt.

Maxine Davis came through the arch with stock, pop-eyed Mike Brown and spindly Larry Miller. I ducked my head as soon as I saw them. They were standing still, looking around. I couldn't tell whether they had spotted me or not.

I chanced a second quick glance. They weren't at the arch any more.

The waitress came back with the drink, a chaser, and the sandwich. I drank and then went for the sandwich. The waitress looked at my sun glasses and said that I must be in the movies. Only actresses and actors, she told me, wore dark glasses at night.

"Inflamed eyes," I said. "Doctor's orders."

That shut her up and she went away for awhile. I was wolfing the sandwich when she came back, leaned over the booth and watched me. I could have kissed her. I could peek between her and the booth and see the arch. Maxine Davis, Brown and Miller came back to it. This time they walked in and took a booth. I felt hemmed in.

The waitress gave me my check and I paid it, with fifty cents on the side for her.

"Tough getting back to Verdes at this time of night when you don't have a car," she said.

"I'm going to Bemis," I told her. "Wrong direction."

I looked between her and the booth before she carried away her disappointment. The Traylocks were arguing about something in the middle of the dance floor. I figured I'd better be running along. The joint was too hot.

I hurried out of the dining room, looking away from the booth and the dance floor. Just outside the arch I stopped cold, as if I'd been hit by a football tackler. Tommy Larson, the janitor, and the heavy-set, wavy-haired croupier at the Estrella Club crap table were having a drink between me and the outdoors.

It looked as if I was sewed in.

I glanced toward the back wall. There was a telephone booth in the far corner. That gave me a start. I could be the victim of a quick tip either from this phone or maybe from some other one in the place. Along the back wall were slot machines, too. They would let me give the boys my back for a while, as I waited for the Traylocks and watched the telephone booth.

I fished in my pants pocket and came

out with three nickels. I stood in front of a machine. By turning my head slightly I could look into the mirror back of the bar and see who left the dining room. I could also watch Larson and the croupier.

My hope was that one of the three nickels would pay so I could keep on playing. I'd feel like a dope just standing there looking at the machine. The first two nickels didn't pay, but three bars came up with the third, the box gave out with considerable clanking and a shower of coins filled the pay-off, rolled on the floor.

Panicky, I started scooping in fast, hoping no one came over to me. I guess it was while I was cleaning up the floor that the Traylocks went out. Three or four idlers loitered over and stared with envious eyes. I glanced into the bar mirror. Larson and the croupier had left, too.

It looked as if I had gummed things plenty.

THE COINS cleaned up, I shot a look at the front door, hoping to pick up Larson or his companion. What I saw was a shock to the system—three deputies, all with their hands on the butts of their guns. The flash that I got of their faces told me they were not dropping in for a free beer. Their eyes were working fast.

I looked at the big neon sign over the door, "HIS."

The deputies all wore ten gallon hats, tan shirts divided from trousers by cart-ridge belts which held manacle cases and .38s. One was short and roly-poly, with heavy glasses and dimples that were not helping him look genial. Another was a big man, one of the heaviest built humans I'd seen in a long time, and the third was a thin one about two inches shorter than myself.

Just about that time I took off easily and gently for the men's room. I slipped inside, pushed open the window catch, raised the lower section and went out. I closed it behind me. I went straight for some parked cars, made use of them for cover, and then continued on into the shadows. I was on the wrong side of the place, opposite from the one where I'd stashed the Chev.

With three guns after me—somebody had used that booth or some other telephone, all right—I headed for the brush.

From there I could see the sheriff's car, with its emblem on the door and a long antenna sticking buglike from the roof.

The boys must be really working the place over, I thought. For I waited for nearly an hour before they came out, talked among themselves for a long minute, and then roared off down the highway as if they had a lot on their minds and I was all of it.

From where I was hiding I could see only one side and the back of the place. The front and far side, where Traylock had parked his car, were blocked off entirely. I ducked back further into the brush, hiked through it until I could get a look. Traylock and his wife had left, all right. Their car was gone.

I had to grope around a while before I found my rented coupe.

I piled into it and started the engine. I didn't turn on the lights as I headed toward the highway. I was getting a faint light from the Inn, so I could see where I was going. I just inched along until I came to what I thought at first was a bundle of rags some tourist had discarded. That was, until I saw it was a woman. She was lying prone, and if I'd gone another ten feet I'd have hit her.

I got out and rolled her over. I thought she was dead at first. I fished out my flashlight and held my hand over her heart. It was pounding. She was Linda Traylock, white-faced, with shadows as deep as ditches under her eyes. Her right eye and cheek were badly bruised.

I felt her heartbeat again, then heard the low moan that escaped from her lips. I looked around. On the highway, fifty yards away, a car swished by. I picked her up—she was even lighter than I thought she would be—and put her in the car beside me. I closed the door on her and her head fell against the panel.

What does a guy do when he finds a dame passed out cold in the desert long after midnight? I didn't know where her husband was, and I doubt if he knew either.

I groped through a collection of ideas which I discarded one after another. One thing I knew was that I wanted to talk to her. And I didn't want to stay around the Railway Inn to do it. There was too much heat on there. Those depts might bob back on the slightest provocation.

The next best thing I could think of was to drive into Rock City, where I had heard they rolled up the sidewalks as soon as the sun went down. That was for me. It certainly was a lot better than Las Verdes where everybody in a uniform was all eyes.

So I started to drive.

Linda Traylock stirred. Her hand went to her face and she said:

"Harry."

Then she looked at me in a way that made me think she would try a nose dive out of the car.

"You're—not Harry," she muttered, her voice thin with fear.

"No," I said. "I'm Blade. You remember me. You needn't be afraid. I—"

She reached for the door handle and I rocked off the highway and grabbed her hand. The light from the airport swung around and hit her full in the face. Her eyes were glassy and her mouth was loose and groggy.

"You're the man who—" She let it hang for a minute, then went on: "You took my husband's gun. You—were going—to kill us!"

"Forget it, Linda," I said softly. "Look—I'm your friend. I want to help you."

SHE gave me a blank look.

"What happened to your eye?" I asked.

The question seemed to shock her into wakefulness, stirred emotion inside of her.

"Harry—hit me!"

"Why?" I pressed.

"I wanted to drive. He was too—drunk to drive. He hit me, and I fell down."

"Where were you?"

"By the car," she said. She drooled and I got out my handkerchief and wiped her lips.

"He was drunk. Hadda a lot on his mind. We lef' that place. I said I should drive an' he hit me. I fell down." She started to blubber and that called for more cleaning up. "He never hit me before."

"Then what did he do?" I asked.

"He wouldn't talk. I asked why he hit me an' he ig-ig-nored me." She sniffled. "He was through with me, so I just wandered—out to the desert to get lost. Then maybe he'd care." She paused, then muttered: "Wanna bed."

Wanna sleep."

"If I get you to a bed will you lie down and go to sleep?" I asked.

"Sure—sure."

I'd seen ads along the highway—there were two or three motels and a hotel in Rock City. I couldn't chance a Las Verdes spot. I started the engine and went into the town. I hit the tourist courts first. "No Vacancy" warned me away three times.

I asked her who had been with her by the car when she got hit, whether her husband had left her at any time while they were at the Inn—I was thinking of that telephoned tip to the deputies—and all I got was a groggy "Dunno." She did remember, however, that the deputies had asked her and her husband whether they had seen "a man named Blade." That told me I'd guessed right.

After parking the car in front of a three-story Colonial hotel I got my bag and went in. The night clerk was asleep in a big leather chair. I shook him and woke him up, asked for a room. He said he had one.

I registered as "Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Oakes, Palo Alto."

"My wife's a little under the weather," I said, apologetically. "I'll get her."

He gave me the key and I went out to the car. Linda Traylock had fallen down behind the steering wheel and was sound asleep. I shook her into semi-consciousness and beat into her brain that she was going through a hotel lobby and had to stay vertical.

Getting her through it and up to the second floor where our room was was something that shouldn't happen in a nightmare. I carried her into the room and she staggered to the bed and fell on it.

But I wasn't through with her yet. I got a towel, soaked it in cold water and put it on her head. I got more towels and wrapped her wrists. Then I started slapping her gently, hating myself and feeling sorry for her. I swept my hand back and forth across her face, hitting her first with the palm and then with the back, until her eyes opened.

"Linda," I said, "I'm going to leave you and let you sleep. But before I go you've got to tell me some things. Remember, I'm trying to help you."

"You got me bed—very nice," she mumbled.

I knew she was full of blanks as far as the night was concerned, but maybe I could take her back a few weeks and she would be clearer in her mind.

"Why did you come to Las Verdes?" I asked her. "Why did Harry come?"

She stared at me blankly, then some intelligence came into her eyes.

"Harry had to see Merle," she said.

"See old pal, Merle." Her lip curled. "Pal?" She questioned Merle Davis' ancestry.

"Go on," I said.

"Harry had the goods on Merle. Cheating—cards—"

LINDA started to go to sleep again. This was driving me insane. I began slapping her, back and forth.

"Seventeen thousand dollars," she muttered. "Harry had witnesses to cheating—took statements—has in safety—in safety—"

"Safety deposit box, Los Angeles," I supplied.

"That's right."

"Those cards I found in Harry's grip—they were Merle's?"

"Used 'em to get seventeen thou—"

"Listen to me," I insisted. "Merle cheated Harry out of seventeen grand. Harry caught him. Demanded his money back. Did he get it?"

She looked at me pleadingly.

"Lemme—sleep."

"In a minute, Linda. Harry found out Merle was in Las Verdes. He came up here with you. Merle said he'd get the money. Right?"

She nodded. I wiped her lips with the towel.

"You know Maxine Davis?"

Her lip curled again.

"Sure. Witch."

"Harry know her?"

She nodded.

"Do you think she killed Merle?"

"That woman—do anything. Knew about Debbie—"

I shook her.

"So Merle got killed. Did Harry kill him? Did he and Merle have a fight? Was Merle trying to slip out from under?"

I was popping them fast now, because I saw she was really passing out.

"Hit me," she mumbled. "First time—"

Two tears streaked down her cheeks from the inside corners of her closed eyes. I wiped her face. I got up from

the bed, picked up a blanket that folded at the foot of it and spread it over her. She looked as if she might sleep the jag off in a week.

I tucked the blanket around her, picked up my bag, locked the door on the outside, and sneaked downstairs. Just as I had figured, the night clerk was pounding his ear.

CHAPTER IX

"Suspect Drowned!"

KNOWING now that I had enough to give Traylock a good working over, I figured on picking him up, if I could find him, and bringing him here before his wife came out of it. The Las Verdes boys wouldn't be looking for me under the name of Oakes in a Rock City hotel room.

As I got into the car and headed for Las Verdes, I ran through the situation as it now stood. At the time I'd arrived there at Merle Davis' request, he, the Traylocks and Deborah Gaynor were planning on taking a plane the next afternoon for Innsbruck, Austria. Why there? That had me stopped. And why me? Though it was plain that Merle Davis had feared something.

The plane had left with none of the four aboard. Davis was dead. Deborah Gaynor had no reason to go now. The police and sheriff's office had told the Traylocks to stay in the vicinity, so they had canceled out.

I got to thinking about the woman who had been left behind.

Maxine, the liar, had known the Traylocks all along. She had known about her husband and Deborah Gaynor. Jealousy? That would account for Maxine sticking the knife in Merle's back—that old stuff about, "If I can't have him, nobody can." And out in the open, too, with a crowd. Much less detectable than a household killing.

What about Deborah Gaynor? Merle Davis, at the last minute, could have fought with her, told her off. If he had her money, what did he want with her? That put her into the picture I was framing.

But what about the gambling double-cross? That would tag Harris J. Tray-

lock, whom I was after right now. Traylock, finding he was being pushed around, about to lose seventeen grand, could have got mad—and he was the action type. He had darned near gone for me even when I'd had a gun in my hand. He had popped his wife in an angry fit. Guys who get mad that fast are apt to pull anything.

There were others, too, that I had to consider. Larry Miller, Mike Brown, Tommy Larson, to name a few. I was beginning to wonder if Brown and Davis could have got into a fight over business, a dame, or something like that when I saw the outline of two cars. I also saw a couple of deputies out in the road, into my lights, and hold up their hands for me to stop.

I wasn't slow on the uptake. By the time I got the set-up, I was double-clutching into second and pounding off the road. The desert wasn't good driving, but it wasn't spring-breaking, either. I saw the ochre flashes as I tore through the brush, cleared the road block, and kept going. I banged back on the road a hundred yards beyond the deputies, with the accelerator on the floor.

I knew they would be coming and coming fast, but I had one break. They would have to make their cars and get up to speed. I was already rolling. I shot down a draw, streaked by the now silent Railway Inn, climbed the hill, whisked by the Estrella Club and started down the grade. Off to the left of me were the lights of Hendricks, a Government community of about a thousand houses.

When I looked back I could see the lights of the sheriff's cars. Ahead I picked up a dirt road angling into the townsite. I blacked out the coupe, heard the tires scream as I shot into the road, dived into a draw, came out of it with the front wheels pawing the air, banged down and rolled onward.

Praying that the boys behind hadn't seen the cut, I got onto what looked like the main street, rocked off it, and started winding every which way. I got a laugh out of it.

"Huh!" I told myself. "I'm lost. If I can lose myself, how can they find me?"

The sound of my voice took the stiffness out of the short hair at the back of my neck and relaxed my tense muscles. I got into alleys, dead-end streets,

streets with curves, and straight streets. The guy who had laid out the place must have been a psychopathic case, and right then I was glad he had been crazy.

I started looking for a hideout, for I couldn't keep this up.

I began to think I'd meet myself at a corner, and this struck me as hilariously funny. In the meantime, I saw that the houses didn't have garages—just roofs held up by four-by-fours for cars. By this time, I got to think that maybe I'd pile into the deputies, so I braked and pulled over. I could hear the sirens. They were a lot louder than if they had gone down the main highway toward Las Verdes.

WELL, if those extended roofs passed for garages, and if I found one that didn't have a car under it, that might help. Twice I passed one place where there was no car, slowing each time. The home had that empty look—no curtains at the windows. Empty cardboard containers were scattered on the front lawn. Strictly unmanicured.

I could hear the sirens more clearly now. I swung in under the roof shelter, kept on going and wheeled sharply so that the Chev lay tight against the back of the place. I dived out, put my knife to work, and got a rear window open. Thoughtfully, the Government hadn't provided screens. My feet sounded hollow on the floor and I risked my flash to see that the joint was empty.

I'd had enough. I couldn't take any more.

I knew I had no more chance of making Las Verdes or Rock City than an armed alien would have of seeing President Truman. There were so many sirens now that they sounded like a symphony orchestra tuning up.

I couldn't go anywhere until daylight.

I went to sleep on the floor, next to a window, a guest of the Government . . .

Dawn light, streaming in through the curtainless windows, woke me. I ducked out through the back door, got my bag and returned. I went to the bathroom, took out my shaving things and opened a faucet. Water ran out of it—cold water.

I got out my brown suit—the gray one I had on looked as if I'd been sleeping in a gutter for a week—and hung it over a door to get some of the wrinkles out. Then I shaved. After that I

took a shower and it brought me back to life. I dried myself on the underwear I'd taken off and put on a complete change.

I felt so good I started to whistle, then caught myself when I saw a guy in the next yard trying to start his car. I dressed fast, threw the soiled stuff in my bag, went out and dumped it into the Chev.

I drove down a gravel alley to a street, found my way out of the cockeyed maze, and finally wound up on the Las Verdes-Rock City Highway.

Driving toward Hickman, I found a quick-order shack at the end of the settlement, isolated from its surroundings. I parked behind the joint, went inside. A dopy waitress in a dirty apron took my order of orange juice, breakfast food, coffee, toast and ham and eggs. I was wearing the dark glasses and kept my hat on.

"All but the ham," she told me.

"Okay," I said, and she went away.

I grabbed the open newspaper on the counter and folded it so I could see the front page. The headline was black. The main banner screamed:

MURDER SUSPECT DROWNED!

I forgot about the food and where I was as I read through the sub-heading that told me Harris J. Traylock had gone into fifteen feet of water in Lake Reade. The story said his car had plunged from the highway, rocketed over some sandy ground to a ledge and had done a nose dive.

A passing tourist, coming from the opposite direction, had seen the erratic course of the headlights from several hundred yards away. He had investigated, then had reported to the Ranger station in Rock City. Chief Peters and Rudy LeRoy had commandeered a couple of wrecking trucks with cranes and had got the car out half an hour later.

The story went on:

Traylock was linked to the mysterious murder of Merle Davis at the Estrella Club only twenty-four hours previous by the discovery of a gold trinket, a dog, which Davis had worn since his discharge from the Service, and which had dangled on a chain between two pockets of his shirt at the time he was stabbed to death.

This, and a spool of heavy brown thread, which Chief Deputy Rayhan, in charge of the sheriff's homicide detail, has yet been unable to connect with the case, were found in a pocket of Traylock's coat.

Immediately after these discoveries, Mrs. Maxine Davis, widow of the slain gambler, was

brought in for further questioning. She identified the trinket, but said she did not know Traylock or why he should have it.

Another element of mystery was injected into the bizarre sequence with the finding of Mrs. Traylock's purse in the death car. Sheriff's deputies and police are seeking the woman, described as thin and blonde, throughout the southern part of the state.

Chief Deputy Rayhan was inclined to believe the death was accidental. He said that he had learned that Traylock had been drinking heavily, had been in no condition to drive, and undoubtedly had fallen asleep at the wheel.

THE next and last paragraph got me.

It said that Rayhan and Police Chief Thomas, of Las Verdes, were still on the trail of the private detective, Nicholas Blade, and that they were "close on his heels."

There was one thing I was pretty sure about—Traylock's death was not accidental. In the first place, if he had been sober enough to drive, by the time he started winding up and down the hills of Rock City and the dam road he would know he wasn't heading for Las Verdes. In the second, why had he had the gold-en dog?

I bolted my food and paid quickly.

My first chore was to drive fast to the hotel at Rock City.

I did, and went into the lobby. The day clerk was on. I went to the desk, identified myself as Oakes, and asked for my key. I had my hat brim pulled down and I was fortified with the dark glasses.

The clerk gave it to me and I went upstairs. I put it in the lock, but found I didn't need it. Linda Traylock was not on the bed. Or on the floor. Or anywhere. Her shoes were gone.

It wasn't hard to figure. She had probably called the night clerk, given him some excuse for being locked in, and had slipped out of the place through a rear door.

I went below and paid the bill. I asked the day clerk where Mrs. Oakes had gone. He looked dumb and puzzled. "I wouldn't know," he replied.

I walked outside and saw a taxi driver parked at the side of the hotel. Linda apparently had had no money, but you can always get a taxi driver to take you to where there is some. I described Linda and asked him if she had hired him. He said no. I got directions to the bus station and the woman behind the counter told me she had just come on and couldn't help me.

So I got into my car and headed down the dam road. I didn't have much trouble finding the spot where Traylock had gone over. I simply drove to a point where I figured the lake below was about fifteen feet deep and got out. By peering over the ledge I could see the marks on the beach where they had hauled out Traylock's sedan.

A look at the ground around me showed me the tracks. I went over them pretty carefully, then studied the highway. I saw the narrow streaks, a couple of feet long—two. I saw a lot of jagged brown bits ground into the highway on the left side of the tracks. I bent down, started digging with my knife. Pretty soon I had a good collection of the bits. I wet them and sniffed.

They were leather. The odor was unmistakable. Those fine lines had been overlooked in the dark the night before.

I got out an envelope and put the brown bits in it. Then I started the Chev and turned back. I saw a sign marked "Las Verdes" and a road running along the lake. I had an idea that this would get me away from there without going through Rock City, and I was right. I wound up in Hendricks. I turned left, and pulled up the hill to the Estrella Club.

CHAPTER X

A Fast, Loud Ride

I ARRIVED later this morning than I had the day before.

The Estrella Club was open. In front of it was a black sedan. I had an idea it belonged to Mike Brown. I came in easy and stopped near the far wall, the one with no windows in it. I walked around and went in the door with my automatic in my hand.

Tommy Larson, his head and shoulders framed in morning sunlight pouring in one of the windows, was cleaning out the wooden money holders on the blackjack table. His face had a look of surprise when he saw me and the gun. The surprise was for the gun.

"Where's Brown and Miller?" I asked. He thumbed. "In the kitchen."

"You'd better come along," I told him. We went through the swinging doors.

Mike Brown went for his holster, but his hand stopped halfway when he saw that my gun didn't want him to reach for it. He eyed my argument.

"We were just makin' coffee, Larry and me," he said, coldly. "Join us?"

Miller swung around from the stove and I thought he was going to drop the pot.

"Hello, Blade," he said. The pot was rigid in his hand, poised over the cups.

"Go ahead and pour," I told him. I turned to Tommy Larson. "You line up over here where I can keep an eye on you," I said, and he shifted.

"What's on your mind?" Brown asked.

"You know about Harris J. Traylock?"

They all nodded.

"I want to know what happened at Railway Inn," I said.

I waited for a crack to the effect that I was there, and should know, but either they were playing dumb to cover up that telephone tip or they hadn't recognized my back when I had hung over the nickel slot machine.

"We usually stop off there after we close," Miller said, pouring coffee. He looked at the gun. "You're going to spoil my drink with that."

"Okay," I said. "So you stop at the Inn."

"Maxine came along, and she was feeling low," Miller continued. "We all drove down in Mike's car. Fortney, the guy at the crap table, went along, and so did Tommy. Mike and I dropped Tommy and Fortney at the bar and took Maxine in to dance. The Traylocks were there—pretty stiff. About this time they took a powder. We followed them. Then the debs came along. They asked about you."

"We sorta had to help the Traylocks out," Larson said. "We went to the car with 'em. They got into it. I told Traylock I'd drive 'em home, and so did Mike and Larry. Traylock got nasty. Said he could drive okay. We stood around, and it looked like they were going to sleep in their car. Like Larry says, we'd come down in Mike's sedan. Mine wasn't running. Mike and Larry drove me home and I went to bed. They went to Rock City."

"That's it," Mike Brown agreed.

"What about the debs?"

"They were searching the joint for you when we left."

"So all that happened was that you guys tried to drive Traylock and his wife to Las Verdes, he wouldn't go for it, so you all went home and to bed."

"That's the story," Larson said.

"What about Maxine?"

"Oh, her?" Larson asked. "She hung around Railway Inn. She said she'd chisel a ride into Verdes off somebody."

"Fortney?"

"He stayed around, too," Larson replied. "Sooner or later you can always get a ride."

"Thanks," I told them.

I backed out the swinging doors and across the dining room to the outside door, not taking a chance on Mike Brown tossing any lead my way. I tore out then, got my car and scrambled.

As I hightailed it for Las Verdes, I started trying to put the puzzle together. They—Miller, Brown and Larson—had told me enough so that I could draw my own picture from the time they left the Railway Inn until Traylock died in his sedan. As much as they'd told me fitted into the way I'd thought it out.

Taking up where my information left off, Traylock and Linda, who hadn't been getting along so well all evening, were groggy and half-asleep in their car. Linda came to, tried to get Traylock to let her drive. He saw red and clipped her, either for waking him up or because she wanted to take the car home. She, her drunken feelings hurt, staggered out onto the desert, and passed out. I found her.

IN the meantime, what had happened? Traylock had been alone in the car, evidently having passed out again after his drunken adventure in amateur pugilism. Who came out and drove him to his death? Somebody did—the somebody who had left leather embedded in the abrasive highway pavement. The job had been done while the tourist-witness was several hundred yards away, giving the killer plenty of chance to hide in his craggy surroundings.

But who? Maxine and the croupier, Fortney, had hung around the Inn. Either could have done it. That went for Miller, Brown and Larson, any one of whom could have doubled back. In fact, it could have been anybody who was in or near the Inn while Traylock slept, or someone who was passing by.

I was getting myself into a knot. But I knew one thing—whoever had killed him had done so for some reason in which the golden dog was involved. And the person who had eliminated Merle Davis had deliberately planted the dog on Traylock to make him look guilty. That, and the spool of heavy brown thread.

I drove out to the airport, and into the waiting room just as a transport was disgorging a load of passengers. I felt myself getting nervous. This was no place for Nick Blade to be, with a whole county looking for him.

I worked my way to the counter and flagged a tall guy in a Trans Globe uniform. I asked him the old question about who was booked for Flight Five and I got the old answer, so I flashed my badge, and handed him the same line I'd given the guy on the graveyard shift.

It worked. But at the same time I saw the fellow at the desk look up. Ever meet somebody you haven't seen for years and see that hazy start of recognition when he has spotted you? That's what I got. Only I knew I had never seen him before.

I talked fast about being up here to locate a fugitive, and that won me the list. My informant recited the names.

"Harold Fesser, Marian Sligh, Dr. and Mrs. Theodore Brandt."

"Thanks," I said. "What about cancellations?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Harris J. Traylock."

"How'd you know about that?"

"Somebody phoned."

"Who?"

"A woman."

"Did you get her name?"

"No."

"That means, then, that you have two empty seats."

"Right."

The man at the desk had given me three separate and distinct looks. Now he was concentrating too hard on a report of some kind. I filtered through passengers waiting for their baggage and got into my car. I headed down the airport road for Las Verdes, trying to grab something that was flitting at the edges of my mind. I was still groping for this mental butterfly when I saw the car coming. It had a red light on the front of it and an antenna. Automatically I ducked my head and scrunched down in my seat.

I wasn't ready for what happened next. From behind the sheriff's car came a second, passing him—at just the point where I would pass him! There wasn't room for three speeding cars, not the way this last car was taking it wide, and there was a deep ditch on my right.

"You fool!" I slammed out, between set teeth as I jammed on my brakes.

Then I saw that the passing car was a sheriff's car, too. I got it then and there, as both cars came at me abreast, braking fast. The passing car and mine stopped, bumper to bumper.

A couple of submachine-guns stared at me with a certain finality.

You don't argue with those things. My hands went up to the roof of the car.

There were four cops in all—two in each car. I recognized three of them—the ones who had been looking for me at Railway Inn. The medium-sized thin guy said:

"Come out with 'em up, Blade."

I did what he told me, thinking that I'd like to get my hands on the throat of that inquisitive guy at the airline station. They frisked me, took my gun and knife, pulled my hands down and behind my back and steel bit into them. They loaded me into one of the sheriff's cars. One got into the back seat with me. He had a submachine-gun. The third climbed into the second car and the fourth into my rented one.

THE honking traffic cleared and we swung around, the other two cars bringing up the rear to be ready to pick me off if somehow I managed to get away from the machine-gun.

It was a fast, loud ride, and before long we were in town, bounding through an afternoon crowd of drunks, down-at-the-heel gamblers out to win what they'd lost in the last six months, dames with too-low blouses, characters in high-heeled boots and wide hats, hangers-on loafing in front of the big casinos wishing for a stake. The lucky bums, I thought. They all had one thing I hadn't—freedom—and how I needed it right now!

The car turned into Third, rolled to a square three-story yellow building among the trees. Anderson, the big deputy, drove to the rear of it, turned into a drive which ended in a traffic circle.

The other cars pulled in and I led the procession through a back door, down a half-flight of worn marble steps. I faced a barred and screened iron door—not the first of its type I'd seen.

"Hi, Jake!" Anderson called.

An old man with thin hair, wasted body and tobacco juice stains at the corners of his lined, leathery mouth, unlocked the door and I was pushed inside. My mind was doing funny things now. I was getting the motive, trying to fit the character into it. But there was one link—no, a couple—still missing.

I had to get out of here.

"I'll get Rayhan," the third dep said.

He went out, up the stairs. In two minutes he was back with a man who had dark, precisely parted hair, an engaging grin that cut lines into his sunburned face, and intelligent dark eyes. I took hope from those bright, quick eyes. He was on the balls of his feet and looked fresh and ready for just about anything. I could see him looking ahead at his career. He had a sheaf of papers in his right hand.

The dep who had brought him in said to me:

"This is Art Rayhan, Blade—Chief of the Homicide Detail."

"Excuse me," I answered, "if I don't shake hands."

Rayhan looked at the depts and said:

"Good work, boys. That'll be all."

Then: "Oh, Anderson—take off the cuffs."

The big fellow did.

"Thanks," I said.

"It was the tip from the airport, wasn't it?" I asked, when they had gone.

"Yes," said Rayhan. "I'll ask the questions. First thing I want to tell you is that under state law we can hold you for seventy-two hours for investigation."

That knocked me straight up in my chair.

"No writs?" I asked.

"No writs."

"That let's your killer go," I told him.

"Let's forget that, Blade. I'd like to know how your fingerprints got on the knife we found in Merle Davis' back."

"That's easy," I said.

I rushed through how I had been hired, about my visit with Maxine Davis, the mysterious telephone call, and the car that ran by the house.

"As near as I can figure," I said, "it's possible that car was driven by the killer. It was too dark to see the make or model. After Maxine and I left, the driver could have broken into the place, covered the knife handle, and could have taken it out to the club for the dirty work. Or you can look at it another way. The car merely ran by and Maxine made a fuss about it, said it had been driving by before. Later, she went back after a handkerchief, brought the knife, too, and did the job."

Rayhan's bright eyes narrowed to shutters.

"Of course, this is merely theory, Blade," he said. "It also can be a nice piece of alibiing. After all, we found your prints on the knife."

I shrugged. Then I asked: "Have you got the golden dog?"

He reached into his pocket, fished it out, and set it on the table beside him.

I PICKED it up. The workmanship was excellent. But it was too light to be solid gold, or solid metal of almost any kind. I began pressing against the tiny legs, the tinier ears.

"What're you doing?" Rayhan asked.

I turned it over, looked at the stomach.

"I don't know myself," I said.

He reached into his pocket and put the spool of brown thread on the table.

"Stop fooling with that thing long enough to tell me about this, if you have any ideas," he demanded impatiently.

"Okay," I said.

I got out the length of brown thread I had picked off the floor at the Estrella Club, compared it with the thread on the spool.

"Got a microscope?" I asked.

"Sure."

"Match the end of the thread I gave you with the end of the thread on the spool."

CHAPTER XI

The Last Hand

RAYHAN called for Anderson and the big deputy came to the door. Anderson told him what to do. The dep lumbered out. I explained to Rayhan how the thread had been used to pull the master switch.

All the while my fingers kept working over the dog. Its mouth was open. I stuck a fingernail into the aperture.

"If the thread ends match up, we've got something to work on," Rayhan said musingly. "That's circumstantial evidence against Traylock. He could have killed Davis and then committed suicide."

Just then, as my fingernail explored the animal's mouth, a little door in its stomach dropped down. I rocked forward, stared at it, and so did Rayhan. The butterfly fluttered again in my brain. I saw the first glimpse of light.

"This dog was made in Europe," I said, half to myself. "America hasn't craftsmanship like that."

A couple of pieces of the puzzle fitted. Before Rayhan could say anything I asked him if he had any information on Traylock.

"His military record, that's all." He shuffled through his papers and produced a teletype. "From Washington," he said.

I grabbed at it and read. These words hit me:

Served with Second Infantry. Participated in following actions: Normandy campaign, North France, Rhineland, Central Europe.

I remembered Merle Davis' discharge papers and told Rayhan about them.

"Traylock and Davis served with the same outfit overseas," I said. "I've been a dope. I knew they'd gambled against each other, but I thought it was in the states."

Rayhan looked at me, his features screwed up into a puzzled expression.

I recalled the slant of sunlight on a face.

"Rayhan," I snapped, "send your boys out to pick up Tommy Larson and Mike Brown. Bring 'em in as fast as the car'll go."

He hesitated, frowning at my tone, then reached for the telephone and called the Hendricks sub-station.

"First time I ever had a prisoner tell me what to do," he said. "Maybe you've got something, Blade. What is it?"

"Only a hunch," I said. "I was overseas myself. After VE Day, the men of the Second Infantry—plenty of them—were billeted in Innsbruck. Probably for a month. There was plenty of gambling, what with not much to do. Floating games in the billets. I wasn't there, but it's always that way. If a guy sent

his winnings home by money order, which was the only way he could, the Post Office Department notified Internal Revenue, so the latter could slap a tax on it. If they were big winnings, the Government got most of them. By hiding them over there and then going back after them, a guy who had cleaned up would save plenty."

Rayhan leaned forward, rubbed the side of his nose speculatively.

"I'm beginning to get it. You mean that either Traylock or Davis cleaned up gambling, and hid the money over there. The other knew about it—"

"Not Traylock, Rayhan. He lost."

"Traylock knew that Davis had hidden the money and was out to get it, then—" Rayhan said.

The big shadow of Anderson fell over us.

"The thread you gave me was broken off the thread on the spool all right, Chief," he said. "The mike shows the strands match."

Rayhan slammed his fist on the table.

"Murder and suicide!" he exclaimed. "Traylock killed Davis, then lost his nerve and bumped himself—or had an accident."

I was just about to show him the bits of leather I'd dug out of the highway when the deps came in with Brown. Brown was raising the devil with Rayhan and demanding to know what it was all about.

"Mike," I snapped at him, "do you keep a razor at the Estrella Club?"

"Of course not. Never shave myself. Always go to my barber in Rock City."

I looked beyond him.

"Where's Larson?" I asked, getting to my feet.

"He quit at noon, Blade," Brown said.

I looked down at Rayhan, my hands working.

AS I glanced at my wrist-watch, I froze. It was five twenty-five.

"Look, Rayhan!" I snapped. "Let me out of here!"

He looked pretty grim.

"I can't do that. We've got to clear this thing up first. Your fingerprints are still on that knife. The newspapers have told the public you're wanted. Dan Dake's up for reelection. He'd be in a nice spot when they found out you'd been released."

"If you let me rot in this dump," I said, "your precious Dan Dake's going to have a lot more to worry about than reelection. Not only that, but you might not get along so well with your new boss. You can lose your killer or you can spring me and make a pinch within the next thirteen minutes, and all be heroes."

I started poking his chest with my finger.

"You've got four nice, big strong deputies. They carry popguns. I haven't even a lead pencil. Let them drive me to the airport and if I don't produce, you can indict, convict and send me to the gas chamber."

That did it.

Things moved fast.

As I led the way into the airport waiting room I found him hard to recognize. One reason was that he had a quarter-profile to me. He was watching the four-engined transport he was going to board, in place of one of the Traylocks, roll to a stop on the ramp. He had on a new, neatly tailored pin-striped blue suit. A blue-gray fedora was over his hair, its brim low down over his colored glasses. He'd stolen my stuff.

I walked over to him and put my hand on his shoulder. He swung around, his hand going for his right coat pocket. I grabbed his wrist.

"Skip it, Larson," I told him.

The deputies closed in and lifted his rod.

A few minutes later Ronald Christian, alias Tommy Larson, and I, faced each other across the table in the little room in the basement of the county building. Cowan and Mulligan brought in his new bags. They found his discharge—Second Infantry.

"If you'll tell us where the map is, Tommy," I said, "you'll save us a lot of time."

He said it was in the lining of the big suitcase. The boys found it.

After that, he talked.

"I hung around Innsbruck," he said, "watching the biggest of the floating games—you know, from apartment to hotel room, and so on. I dropped about five hundred. Then I saw this Merle Davis was winning everything. I got smart, quit, and started watching his hands. He was cheating. There was always a mob watching the play so he didn't pay any attention to me. I got

to thinking that I had as much right to the dough he was winning as he did. I knew that if you mailed anything over a couple of hundred bucks you were called up before your CO and asked whether you'd been black-marketing or cheating. Davis wasn't sending any money orders, either."

"He was stashing it," I cut in.

"That's right. There must've been a hundred grand. He took it all one windy, rainy night, in a canvas bag and headed out of Innsbruck. He hit one road, cut across to another, went up into those mountains. He had a flash and kept making notes of some kind. He was drawing a map. I had nothing, the wind and rain were whipping into my face, and I couldn't have used a torch if I'd had one. He went up the side of one mountain, twisted around, doubled back. Somehow I lost him. I had to give up.

"The next day he went to an antique shop and bought the knife and the dog. I went inside after he'd left. There was another dog, and I found out how it worked—how you pressed a tooth and the stomach flew open. Then I knew where the map he'd made was. But he was a high point man. I didn't get another chance at him before he was shipped out."

"When did the booby trap blast you?" I asked him.

"It wasn't a booby trap. It was a land mine. It got my hands, and most of my face. It was in a British hospital, then they shipped me to Texas. When I got out I didn't look like Ronald Christian. So I became Tommy Larson and set out looking for Davis, knowing he'd never recognize me."

"You found him here, bided your time, and when you learned he was going to leave for Austria you stabbed him with his own knife."

"That's right."

I TOLD the rest of his story—how he had watched every move Davis had made, how he had driven by the Davis house in the jalopy, how he had got in and found the knife, and preserved the prints.

"You thought the prints would be Maxine's," I told him. "You knew all about the Deborah Gaynor deal, and you figured the cops would hang it on her long enough for you to get away."

"That's right," he said.

"But the Traylocks complicated things. You bumped Traylock for several reasons—because you didn't know why he was around, what he knew, and you thought you could pin the rap on him and confuse the issue while you got away in his seat on the plane. Bumping him was easy because he was in an alcoholic stupor. After Mike and Larry left you at the Estrella Club you walked back the half a mile to the Railway Inn, drove him to his death. They hadn't held Maxine. You figured the dog and the spool of thread would make it murder and suicide and then the case would be closed.

"What was the gag about Mike's razor?" Rayhan asked me.

"Tommy had a skin grafting job—plastic work—done on his face. They used skin from other parts of his body. It didn't grow whiskers. I saw that this morning when he stepped into a ray of sunlight, but it was slow in registering."

I got up. I was more tired than I'd ever been in my life.

"Make a complete report to the War Department," I told Rayhan. "Send along the map. I suppose, after the Government gets its share, the rest is Maxine Davis'."

They locked up Larson.

Old Jake let us out. We all walked into the night.

We shook hands and Rayhan said the next time I was in Las Verdes I should drop in.

"Don't make us look for you," he said. "You're too hard to find."

I got into my own car and drove to the Mesquite Motel. There was a light in Fourteen. I parked and knocked.

Linda Traylock opened the door. Her right eye was black and blue and the skin had turned purple over the cheekbone. Her eyes were both swollen from crying. I went inside.

"You canceled out at the airport?" I asked.

She nodded.

I told her the story of Tommy Larson, alias Ronald Christian. She listened wordlessly. She showed no emotion. That was all washed out of her.

"You're justly entitled to some of that dough if Maxine ever gets any of it from the Government," I finished. "Your husband was cheated out of it, and you can prove it."

She looked at me a long time, her right hand rising slowly to caress her right cheek, as if it was a legacy, remembering.

"But that won't bring Harry back, will it?" she asked.

I didn't have an answer for that one.

Next Issue's Novel: THE RADIO CITY MYSTERY, by KURT STEEL

**YOU HAVE
SUCH A
BOYISH FACE!**

**DON'T LET THAT
STAR SHAVE
FOOL YOU, SISTER!**



4 for 10¢
also 25¢ pack
STAR SEALECTED®





Benny grabbed a handful of Willie's coat and yanked him close

Stuck With the Evidence

By JOE ARCHIBALD

A LOYSIUS "Satchelfoot" Kelly came into the office of the Hawk-eye Detective Agency, Inc., one afternoon with his crying towel. Satchelfoot looked as fed up with the world as the dove of peace and Willie Klump knew the flatfoot had to be very low in spirits indeed to come to him for comfort.

"You could of saved a nickel subway fare by goin' to a dictionary, Satchelfoot," Willie needed. "As far as you are concerned, sympathy is just a word with me. It is because that pretty matron was sprung by the grand jury, ain't it? For onct it looked like you had picked up a candidate for the sizzle sofa and was already countin' the volts. Then —blooey as of usual."

When it's the finale for Ferdinand Fingly, Willie Klump makes progress in his investigation — by backing into the solution!

"I'll throw away my badge," Kelly griped. "That tomater was as guilty as a fox with chicken feathers in its teeth, and she beat the true bill by buyin' a false alibi."

Willie poked at his right ear. "Begin ag'in, Satchelfoot. Come up a little slower, huh?"

"Awright, let's start where they found the body of her husband," Satchelfoot growled. "He has been shot by a thirty-eight caliber slug and nobody is around sittin' up with him when the cops git there. We grill the elevator man at the apartment house and he says he didn't remember seein' Mrs. Ferdinand Fingly durin' the time when the rubout could of been committed. Anyways the Fingly flat was on the third floor and some citizens walked up or down. He did remember seein' a dame wearin' a heavy veil and a coat he never saw on Mrs. Fingly."

"So far everythin' is very clear," Willie sniffed. "Like I was tryin' to look through a bowl of gravy."

"Lemme finish," Kelly yelped. "We pick up the babe around nine p.m. when she gets to the flat. She sees the thing with the sheet over it an' faints. After we bring her to we ask why she did it. She says she was at the movies since six-thirty. The corpse expert said Fingly was erased around seven or after. We ast what movie. 'Looie's Fifty-Ninth,' she says, and right quick I ask what is showin' there. She takes too much time out and I know I got her. She can't think of either B pitcher, Willie. We book her."

WILLIE Klump refreshed himself by taking another gander at Satchelfoot's gloomy phiz.

"All that, I know," Willie said. "It comes out that Mrs. Fingly's ardor for her spouse had hit the deep freeze and she'd met a buddin' young crooner who already had a wife tryin' to understand him, but couldn't. So she attempted to shield the Romeo, but he would have none of it, and came to the D.A. and established Mrs. Fingly was in his lodgin's durin' when Fingly was rubbed out. The crooner's ball and chain attacked the pretty widow when she was sprung and it took four big strong policemen to remove her mitts from Mrs. Fingly's lily-white throat. Mrs. Fingly assured the doll after first aid that her interest

in the would-be-Como was simply professional and plutonic and she wanted to see him reach the top. That is all, huh?"

"I says she is guilty," Satchelfoot iterated.

"Right there is the proof of her absolute innocence," Willie sniffed. "But it is odd there are no other suspects. Only a citizen Fingly fired from his office a week before and he happened to be in Detroit lookin' for a job at the time of the slaughter."

"Maybe you didn't hear Fingly was about broke at the time of his death, hah?" Satchelfoot continued. "He was insured for fifty grand only three months ago."

"Yeah?" Willie inquired. "A lawyer—broke?"

"He liked the hayburners and thought he was a wov with the pasteboards," Kelly snapped. "Mrs. Fingly says all she has besides the insurance is some stock she owns and must liquidate like Fingly was. So a bunch of lemonheads on the gran' jury look at her pretty pan, her gams, and agree she couldn't do such a dastardly deed. No wonder crime pays. I ought to quit."

"Nobody in town will argue that point," Willie sniffed. "They paid Mrs. Fingly the insurance yet, Satchelfoot?"

"They have not. They ain't as dumb as citizens on grand juries, Willie. You wait and see as she ain't in the clear no more'n a plumber with his arm caught in a drain pipe."

Willie nodded. "I admit the insurance angle don't smell like lavender salts, Satchelfoot. Well, I'm a busy man, and my time is valuable. A client might come in and want that chair."

"I'll get that babe in one yet," Satchelfoot said. "You wait and see, Willie!"

"Hurry it up, then," the shamus quipped. "I ain't gittin' no younger."

When Satchelfoot had nearly slammed the door loose from its frosted glass, Willie sighed and looked through the papers on his desk. There were a few newspaper clippings there he'd thought might lead him to an honest dollar or two. They had to do with missing persons, infidelity, and hot jewelry. He had phoned some of the citizens involved and promised them quick results. Well anyway, they'd said they'd get in touch if all other means failed.

"This one," Willie mumbled, as he picked up a clipping bearing a half-tone

and four sticks of lower case, "looks like rank publicity to me. A cute number awright, and blonde. Stage doll. Came into her apartment and a guy jumped out and knocked her as cold as a polar bear's nose. Stole jewelry valued at twenty grand. One item a diamond brooch made up like three bows of ribbons all put together. Worth eight thousand clams. Huh!"

Willie picked up another tabloid clipping. He picked up the phone, dialed a number. A woman's voice answered and it sounded like long fingernails being drawn along the side of a rusty saw.

"Yes, this is Mrs. Herkimer Younce," the voice said. "I don't lissen t' no radio pograms."

"Hah, this is the Hawkeye Detective Agency," Willie said. "You find your missin' husband yet? Why not let me try, if you haven't?"

"Are you kiddin', Buster? Looks like you didn' see the next day's paper. I know where he is, which is in a hospital in two plaster casts as he showed the next mornin' with a babe's compact in his pocket. G'by!"

"I wonder how long it would take a guy to learn a different business," Willie sighed, and opened up his desk drawer and brought forth a stale jelly doughnut. "I wish I had a magic lantern to rub."

WILLIE rubbed his noggin instead. Then his door opened and he turned to see a very delectable package of femininity close it behind her. She wore a short fur coat that even Willie knew was no relation to the rabbit family and a hat that would have even helped his girl, Gertie Mudgett, get a new look. It was the red cherry atop a peach parfait. Her hair was the touch of caramel. What a dish! And Willie wondered at himself for assuming he had ogled this wren before.

"Mr. Klump?"

The silvery and sugary voice moved Willie's Adam's apple up and down and twitched his ears.

"I'm sure lucky to be him," he said, and got up quickly and dusted off the spare chair. He helped her into it as if she'd been made of blown glass and nearly fell on his face getting to his own. "Ah—er—now, madam," he finally choked out. "What is your problem? You want your husband followed, huh?"

"I am afraid even you couldn't do that, Mr. Klump," the client said. "You see he is dead. I am Mrs. Ferdinand Fingly."

"Yes, I see what you mean, ha-ha—wha-a-a-t?"

"Now, now, Mr. Klump, don't let me scare you," the widow said. "I am not a homicidal maniac. Of course if you don't wish to take my case, I can go elsewhere."

"Don't mind me," Willie said hastily. "I just got over a breakdown and—why, I never figured you was guilty."

Mrs. Fingly thanked Willie sweetly, then waited until the president of the Hawkeye gulped down two aspirins. "It is this way, Mr. Klump. I am being driven to distraction by the press. It is because, I suppose, that I'm a—er—that I photograph well. A pretty widow still wearing the cloak of suspicion—made to order for tabloid newspapers."

"You ain't no old bag," Willie agreed. "It must be awful to be dead and have a wife like you."

Mrs. Fingly batted her pretty eyes and reached up quickly to straighten her hat. "That wasn't bad, Mr. Klump—ha."

"Er, where do I come in?" Willie forced out.

"I need a person for a bodyguard," Mrs. Fingly said. "Someone to keep undesirable persons away from me, to push a cameraman in the face if need be. I'm so unprotected, Mr. Klump."

"Why—er—I am not one to desert one of the weak sex at such a time," Willie said.

"Then you'll be at my apartment tomorrow? Oh, there'll be a third person there. A maid I just took on." The widow smiled. "About your fee, Mr. Klump. My husband's affairs are quite hopeless and the insurance people still want more proof that—"

"Ten dollars a day," Willie said.

"That is very reasonable and I hope I can meet it," the comely client said, dabbing at her eyes with a hanky. "However, I'll pay you somehow."

"It is a deal," Willie said, and took his client's arm and escorted her to the door. Willie wondered what kind of powder he was sniffing when he closed the door, gun or face. He had little beads on his roundish face when he fell into his chair. Only a few days ago he'd listened to a radio thriller wherein a

pretty tomato had been declared innocent of arsenic poisoning and it ended up by four other characters biting the almond before she was led screeching to the State goofy house. "Well, I'll be on my guard," Willie stoutly assured himself. "It wasn't only yesterday I heard about the birds and bees."

The phone rang and Willie knew who wanted him before he picked it up. Even a public utility gadget seemed to reflect Gertrude Mudgett's inimitable personality.

"Hello, Willie," she said. "Guess what Thursday is?"

"Your birthday," Willie gambled, and won.

"Oh, you thoughtful darlin'," Gertie cooed. "I knew you wouldn't forget so I bought me two tickets out of your money for a show. It is a mellerdrama at the Boothby, Willie. 'The Milkman Only Rings Oncet'."

SHE waited for comment from Willie Klump who flinched back.

"Great," he said. "I knew I would surprise you."

"Don't forget we got a winder shippin' date tomorrer morning," Willie," Gertie said.

"Oh, oh, I got me a client," Willie said. "I got to report first thing in the A.M. Who do you think?"

"Not Harry Truman, Willie?"

"Don't be silly. It is Mrs. Ferdinand Fingly, Gert."

"Never heard of the—what-a-t?" That murd'ress, Willie? Don't?"

"It is to protect her from the press," Willie said.

"Who'll pectect you?" Gertie asked. "That dame was guilty like everybody thinks. She'll insure you as a body-guard and then you'll be just cold meat. That pretty face is foolin' you, too. You resign right away."

"You forget I have to eat," Willie said. "I'll call you tomorrer night and report."

"Look, Willie—I"

"Sorry, another client is here," Willie said, and hung up. He shook his head.

"I am closer to gittin' murdered every day with her and she knows it," he sighed. "Well, I better go home and press up my new suit and find a clean shirt. I got to be representable seein' it is the high brackets I am in."

At nine o'clock the next morning,

William J. Klump rang the bell of an apartment on East Thirty-second Street.

A dish that was not Mrs. Fingly opened up and peered out at him. Willie's cowlick twanged under his hat. This babe had coppery locks and a face that would look well on a beer ad.

"We got a vacuum cleaner and have started three characters in at college already with magazines," the maid said. "Git lost, Buster."

"There is a mistake," Willie said. "I am Mr. Klump who—"

"No, it can't be," the chick said. "Not this big a mistake. I'll call Mrs. Fingly."

"I never saw worst manners," Willie bridled. "I shall report you, sister."

"Take off your hat," the maid snapped.

Willie sat down. He was reaching for a copy of a current mag when his employer appeared. Mrs. Fingley wore a housecoat of a very sleek material that did things for her she really did not need. Her hair-do looked different without a hat. There were little gold rosettes in her ear-lobes. She held out her hand to Willie and he took it. The maid seemed dazed.

"Oh, I'm so glad you arrived, Mr. Klump," Mrs. Fingly said dulcetly. "Three newspapers have called up already and I refused interviews."

"I see," Willie said. "Leave them try and prosecute you, Ma'am."

"Bring Mr. Klump some coffee, Loretta," Mrs. Fingly said, and Willie wished Satchelfoot Kelley could see him now.

"Make it two doughnuts," Willie said.

The shamus was finishing his first cup of coffee when the doorbell rang.

"I'll answer it!" Willie said sternly and proceeded to earn his fee. He opened the door and saw a beefy face and he pushed it with his hand.

"Scram!" he said. "And tell all the other newspaper bums don't waste time." He slammed the door and turned and grinned at his employer.

"Git tough is my motto," he said.

"I may be wrong, Mrs. Fingly," the maid said. "But I'm sure that was the landlord, Mr. Frabzicki."

There was an angry hammering on the door.

"I'll get it this time," the maid said. She let a very irate citizen in. Mr. Frabzicki threatened to evict the occupants of the apartment. He did more than threaten about an increase in rent.

BUT Mrs. Fingly placated him until he purred. He had a drink and promised to decorate the entire joint before he withdrew.

"You need a bodyguard," the maid said to the mistress, "like an octopus needs another arm. Klump, you started off good."

"Now anybody can make mistakes, Lucretia," Mrs. Fingly said. "If there's anything I like it's a couple of laughs. You slay me, Mr. Klump."

"Huh?" Willie gulped. "Oh, it was just a figment of speech. I—"

"Have some more coffee," the maid said. "That first cup didn't seem to work. We generally git our man with the first snort, don't we, Mrs. Fingly?"

Lucretia. Willie was sure he'd heard about a dame with a name like that before and she hadn't been any Sister Kenny.

"Er, I don't feel like a second cup, thanks. Ha!" He began to wonder where Mrs. Fingly would keep a Roscoe if she had eased off her husband, Ferdinand. The cops had a bullet but nothing to match it up with.

"Mr. Klump, I have to do some shopping," his client said. "I'll be dressed in a few minutes. You shall accompany me. Lucretia, entertain Mr. Klump while I'm gone."

"That does it, ma'am," Lucretia said. "I quit!"

"You ain't no nourishment to me neither," Willie sniffed. "Anyway, I go steady with a dame."

"That I would like to see!" Lucretia laughed, and then the door opened. Gertie Mudgett strode in.

"Well, do," Willie choked out. "I forgot to lock that door. Hello, Gert!"

"A newspaper woman," Mrs. Fingly screeched. "Eject her, Mr. Klump!"

"You don't know what you're sayin'!" Willie yelped. "Hello, G-Gert!"

"Some layout!" Miss Mudgett snorted. "So now you know where to git 'em wholesale!"

The maid made a very grave error by taking Gertie's arm and twisting. Lucretia went high into the air and disappeared behind a divan. Mrs. Fingly reached for a vase, dumped the flowers out of it and rushed the intruder. Gertie side-stepped nicely and threw a hook.

Mrs. Fingly's pretty eyes merged and she teetered on her mules. Gertie followed up with a left and Mrs. Fingly

looked quite as inanimate as had her former husband when she hit the Oriental rug.

Gertie swerved toward Willie.

"You rooey! You're next! I'll—"

Something bounced off Gertie's head and Willie saw that it was the silver coffee pot. Lucretia leaned against the divan, grinning.

"How'd she like them for apples?"

Willie knelt beside Gertie and took her hat from over her eyes.

"What round is it, Willie? she asked, then jumped to her feet. "Oh, so they want to git tough, huh?"

"No, Gertie, no!" Willie gulped. "Wait until I collect what's comin' to me."

The maid helped Mrs. Fingly to her feet and told her to make an appointment with her dentist right away. The doll the grand jury had smiled upon told Willie he was fired.

"Pay him!" Gertie said. "Or else!"

Mrs. Fingly demurred, but not for long. "Lucretia," she said. "Get that old suit of my late husband's out of the closet. That's all he'll get!"

"Take it, Willie," Gertie said. "It has to be stylish and you never had style up to now."

"Sounds like a good deal," Willie gulped.

He walked out with Gertie Mudgett, the suit draped over his arm. It was a plaid creation and quite shiny in spots. Gertie said she couldn't wait until she saw Willie in it. Willie assured her she would have to, as Ferdinand Fingly had been well over six feet in his socks.

"The things you git into, Willie," Gertie said as she took leave of him at a subway. "If I make myself believe for sure that was a love nest, you start hittin' the road!"

"Yeah," Willie breathed out.

"There was murder in her eyes, Willie. She sure beat that rap. Well, g'by. And git the suit altered soon as you can."

WILLIE trekked toward his office, feeling radio-activated. He wondered how long it took certain deadly poisons to work, even on him. He wondered if there wasn't an easier way to make a living.

When Willie finally got to his rooming house, he tried on the double-breasted coat and vest. The plaid scared

him at first when he looked in the mirror but he kept looking until he got used to it. The suit fit quite well and now Willie knew he only had to get the pants shortened. He'd take them to the tailor the first thing in the morning.

"I bet that babe is guilty," he said.

Thursday evening, William J. Klump met Gertie in front of La Lune Bleu, a popular stoking place on East Forty-seventh. Gertie told Willie she'd call a cop when he tipped his hat.

"Look, I am Willie," he said.

Gertie took a second gander and grabbed Willie's arm. She spun him around.

"Willie, you are gorgeous, no kiddin'. You got a new look. I bet they will ast you to switch to Culvert. For oncet I will go into a joint not feelin' like I am follered by a panhandler. Oh, let's hurry, Willie."

They went into La Lune Bleu. Gertie slipped Willie a ten-dollar bill. They got as far as the entree when Willie began to squirm. Gertrude Mudgett told him it was pretty late in the spring to still have his red flannels on.

"I discarded them weeks ago" Willie grunted and twitched like a snowbird who hadn't seen happy dust in six weeks. "I guess it must be a horsehair in this burlap. Ow-w-w!"

"For Heaven's sake," Gertie yipped. "You'll have me doin' it in a minute. Was you near the monkey cage at the zoo lately?"

"Ver-r-y funny," Willie sniffed, and squirmed again like a disgusted moppet at a lecture. He closed his eyes and grunted and dug his fingers into his torso just above his floating ribs. Customers began to eye him askance.

"Look, Gert, I better go and see what is needlin' me besides you," Willie finally said, and got up and sought the men's washroom. He took off his coat and waited a few moments and he no longer felt the unease. He explored the vest, found it innocent, then examined the lining of the plaid coat. His fingers traveled to a hard lump just under the inside pocket and closer examination found the lining had been ripped.

Willie opened a penknife and got to work. Finally he pulled something out of the lining of the late Ferdinand Fingly's coat that made him blink. His ears vibrated and there was a sudden disturbance at his meridian like little

pixies were treading down what food he'd already eaten.

Willie was no expert on valuable dornicks but even he knew there were diamonds. They were set in three bows made out of metal that had never been fashioned from a tin can. Three bows of ribbon! Willie sat on the paper towel hamper and tried to think. He forgot Gertie Mudgett. Suddenly he knew he should get to his office right away. He pocketed the bauble and hurried out. On his way past the cashier's desk he thought somebody called to him, but paid no attention. It sounded like a dame. He grabbed a cab and directed the driver to the dingy office building on Lexington.

"I've seen this thing before," he kept telling himself, but how could that be?

Willie snapped on the light in his little office and pawed through the papers on his desk. After awhile he took a gander at the tabloid clipping having to do with a stage babe getting clipped for thousands of clams' worth of gewgaws.

"Huh, here's the inscription of the one I got. Worth eight grand. There could be two in town. It is silly thinkin' this broach belonged to the blonde doll as I found it in the pocket of Ferdinand Fingly's coat, deceased. Name under the pitcher says she is Jonquil Del Rey."

The time flew. Willie finally stopped making notes and took a gander at his watch. It was eight o'clock. A truck backfired outside and Willie jumped a foot off his chair.

"Awright, Gert!" he yelled, swinging around. "So I forgot. I—Gert!" Willie, cold sweat popping off his brow, hurriedly looked up La Lune Blue in the phone book.

HE got the number and hurriedly dialed it. A gruff voiced character answered it and Willie asked who it was. It was the head waiter.

"Look," Willie said in a dither, "I was there with a dame. She wore a red hat with a green feather in it and a cinema-colored fur coat and ear-rings as big as eggs. She—"

"Yeah? Are you the guy in the race-track suit?"

"It is a plaid one I'll thank you to know," Willie said distractedly. "Page the dame and tell her I'll—"

"Pal, I'm giving you some advice," the head waiter said. "I wouldn't show here.

Right now that babe is out in the kitchen up to her elbows—and not in Lux. We saw you lam from the rest'raunt so before that babe eats up too much more we ast that babe can she dig up the bite for the cutlets. She says you had all the clams and—well, we ain't in this business for our health. No, pal, leave her have maybe three days to cool off unless you want to be on ice permanent. G'by now."

Willie hung up. The cold brine trickled out of his scalp and he was as worried as a character getting a pant leg slit and his hair shaved off.

"This is awful," Willie gulped. "It is worst than terrible even. Well, I better go to the show as I can't waste the tickets. I might as well enjoy my last hours as tomorrer I could be laid out in a bier parlor. I wish I didn't forget so easy. Huh, that broach. In the late Fingly's pocket! Maybe Mrs. Fingly rubbed him out for two-timin' and not for the insurance lettuce. Maybe he knew this Jonquil Del Rey and—maybe Fingly was a master wolf and had a dozen dishes."

Dishes! Willie closed his eyes and shuddered.

The president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency looked up his operations office and left the building. Having ten dollars he took a cab and landed in front of the Boothby in style. An usher took him down the aisle, a flashlight showing her the way. The play was already eating through the first act. Willie climbed over two gripping playgoers and fell into a seat.

"Huh," he said aloud. "I am just three rows from the stage."

"Sha-a-adup!" a citizen said.

"Who's smokin'?" Willie countered facetiously. "I would take somethin' for your nerves if I was you. What happened so far, huh?"

Threats of cold-blooded murder came to Willie's ears from the customers surrounding him so he settled down to see if a milkman only rang twice and for what reason. At the moment there were three characters on the stage, two males and a blonde trick wearing a strapless gown. It occurred to Willie after concentration that the doll was supposed to be the wife of one of them and the willing victim of the other's wiles.

"I tell you, Hobart," the blonde emoted, "Humphrey was not here last night! You and your suspicions an' your

jealousy. I tell you I can't stand it much longer. I can't! I can't! I can't!"

"It looks like she can't," Willie sniffed.

"She tells you the truth, Hobart!"

"Both lyin' are you? The milkman saw you come out of my house at four A.M.!" the character with the Adolph Menjou lip fringe bleated dramatically.

"So you believe a milkman before you do your wife, do you, Hobart?"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake," the suspected home wrecker orated.

"Oh, brother," Willie observed.

"Sha-d-d-d-up!"

The usher came and talked to Willie. In tones no longer polite, she assured him he would get flung out on his rompers if he created further disturbance. Willie subsided and took a gander at his program. He brushed up on the cast, then felt flying creatures in his stomach. He read a certain line of type three times. It finally convinced him that the unfaithful wife, Minerva Effingham, was played by Jonquil Del Rey. He felt little prickly pears breaking out along his spine and watched the play avidly, chewed his fingernails until a customer next to him gave up and left the theatre.

It was the last of the second act.

Minerva Effingham and her wavy-haired two-timer finally decided to erase Hobart Effingham.

"You can plead self-defense," Humphrey suggested. "When the cops come you will be all bruised up like—"

The play went on. Came the scene in Minerva's boudoir when she took a Betsy out of the drawer in her dresser and leveled it at her surprised spouse. Something snapped in Willie Klump's noggin when Hobart yelled:

"Where did you get that gun, Minerva? Drop it!"

"Yeah," the shamus said aloud, "Where did she?"

"I am going to kill you, Hobart Effingham!" the blonde said. "It is self defense and I'll prove it, ha!"

"No, Minerva, no! You must be crazy!"

Bang!

Hobart clapped a hand to the front of his dickey, looked horrified according to plan and then draped himself over a chaise lounge and gasped his last. William J. Klump got up from his seat, fairly climbed over four customers and

reached the aisle. He ran toward the stage, climbed over the footlights, and rushed at the blonde.

"Awright!" Willie yelled. "Gimme that Rosco!"

The Boothby was thrown into a Donnybrook. At first, playgoers thought it might be part of the act. Then the cops came charging down the aisle. The blonde stared at Willie aghast and then started screaming. The character named Hobart resurrected himself and sprang up from the chaise longue. Stage hands rushed out of the wings. A loud voice roared;

"Curtain! Lower the curtain!"

The entire cast of "The Milkman Only Rings Once" came on stage and they ganged up on Willie. They finally caught up with him but not until he had the play Betsy. It was tucked away inside his plaid vest when they lifted him to his feet and tossed him into a cop's arms. Onto the stage came a big citizen in a tux just as William J. Klump pleaded his case.

"I am a private detective!" Willie choked out. "I am here on official business. It is about the murder of a Ferdinand Fingly who was shot by a Rosco nobody could find!"

"Arrest that crazy man!" Jonquil Del Rey screeched. "Oh, Benny, I am so glad you're here!"

She wound her arms around the bulky gee in the tux and Willie appraised the man in a hurry. Somewhere he had seen him before. He had a face with as much meat on it as a three-rib roast of beef, studded by a pair of piggy eyes that glittered like the sparklers in the bauble Willie had in his coat pocket. They reminded the president of the Hawkeye to come up with the brooch, which he did.

"Okay, ask the babe why I found this brooch in the pocket of a suit Mrs. Fingly gave me for workin' for her durin' a brief time," Willie yelled as the cops tried to drag him into the wings.

He held it high for everybody to see, and then the big citizen called Benny tossed the blonde dish aside. He let out a roar that only should have come from a lion's cage and grabbed the brooch from Willie's hand.

"You found it—where?" With his free hand he got a big handful of Willie's coat and yanked the private eye in close.

"You heard me," Willie yipped. "In the pocket of a suit worn by Ferdinand

Fingly whose widow just got sprung by a grand jury. You ain't deaf! Stop tearin' my suit!" He gave Jonquil Del Rey a swift gander and saw that the doll looked as healthy under her paintjob as eleven cents' worth of dog meat.

"What are you doin' on this stage?" a cop asked the big character.

"Git lost!" the big gee in the formal burlap growled. "I am Benny Kouf if ya want to know!" He whirled toward the blonde doll. "How's it they find this trinket I gave ya on a stiff, hah?"

"It is a mistake, Benny! There could be more'n one. I was robbed of mine and—"

"Bushwah!" Benny yelled. "It was the only brooch like it in the U. S."

THE curtain stayed down and Willie Klump could hear the customers out there seeking the exits. Onto the stage came two irate citizens who introduced themselves as the manager of the Boothby and a producer respectively.

"You'll sweat for this, somebody!" the manager screeched. "We gotta refund all the dough. We had a play here we spent—"

"This last act is for real," Willie cut in. "Awright, sha-a-a-d-up and let's listen to the blonde answer a hun'red an' sixty-four buck question!" He knew now where he had seen Benny before. Benny Kouf was a questionable operator who controlled every bubble-gum and perfume vending machine along the Atlantic seaboard, and once had beaten a rap. Benny, people had been saying for a long time, had more dough than anybody with the possible exception of Uncle Sam. "Keep astin' her, Benny!"

"Talk fast, baby!" Benny yipped. Now I know what become of all the other sparklers I was sucker enough to give ya! So you was two-timin' with me and financhin' a jiglo named Fingly, hah?"

"It is a lie, Benny!" Jonquil Del Rey yowled. "It looks like that Fingly led—a double life—and went around robbin' places at night. He was the one slugged me that night and stole twenty grand worth of the stuff. See?"

"Yeah, baby," Benny said. "Could be, couldn't it?" He turned and grabbed for Willie's throat. "Tryin' to louse up my doll's act, huh? Tryin' to frame the poor kid, yeah? Well, they won't have enough of you to throw in jail, you crumb."

"Don't you attackt me!" Willie yelled. "I have got the proof she is still a fast one. Lemme ast ya—did the cops find the Betsy that rubbed out Fingly?"

"What you beefin' about?" Benny Kouf growled. "A Betsy? I s'pose you found it lemonhead!"

"I'm takin' an awful chance that I did," Willie gulped. "Where would be the easiest place to stash a murder Roscoe than in the blonde's dressin' room, hah? Who would think to lok among stage props unless it was somebody like me who was stuck with the evidence in the first place? Ha, that is funny!"

"Don't listen to him, Benny!" Jonquil Del Rey pleaded.

"Let's put it this way," William Klump said. "The Rosco I got here was filled with blanks for tonight's turkey, wasn't it? Or else Hobart here would be shakin' hands with Ferdinand Fingly. It could shoot real bullets, too. Well, we will go downtown and fill it with real slugs and shoot one into a barrel of cotton or somethin' and then compare the marks on it with the ones on the bullet took out of the late Mr. Fingly. If they match, this tomatore here will have quite a time explainin' how the Rosco got out of the Boothby, knocked off a citizen, and then found its way back so's it could make out it slew Hobart Effingham."

Benny Kouf's two chins shook. He gave the blonde cooky he had been sponsoring a look that wasn't new.

"Why, you double-crossin' broad! I got a good mind to tie your throat into a knot. I t'ink I will do that! Me, a sucker for a gimmick like that!"

He lunged toward the blonde and Willie roared, "Look out!" He was a little late. Jonquil Del Rey had stolen a Betsy out of a cop's holster, and now she shot a piece of cloth off Benny Kouf's expensive tux.

"Everybody stay where they are or I'll shoot to kill!" the blonde threatened, and backed away. "Before I leave, though, I'm goin' to fix your wagon!"

"Who—m-me?" Willie gulped out. "Look I got a big fam'ly—and I forgot my last—somebody stop her!"

"Awright, you ast for it!" Jonquil snapped and lined Willie up. Kerwhop! She dropped the gun, got her pretty gams crossed up and spun around like a top losing its spin. Jonquil sat down, grinning like a village zany watching a

circus parade. Willie Klump gaped at Gertrude Mudgett and guessed the reprieve would do him no good.

"I should of let her kill you, hah?" Gertie roared. "Nobody's goin' to cheat me out of no murder! Happy birthday to me, Willie, as if you should of ever been born. You won't see your next one, you wart!"

"Get holt of her!" Willie roared at the cops.

PPROMPTLY they grabbed her, but not for long. Benny Kouf, who had learned his mayhem along the docks in Brooklyn, finally subdued Gertie.

"I hate to slug dames," Benny said. "What else could I do?"

"You can say that ag'in," Willie sighed. "Well, we better all go to Headquarters and ring the curtain down."

In the presence of the D.A., Satchelfoot Kelly, and others of the cast, Jonquil Del Rey tossed aside her stage glamour, let down her blonde tresses and threw the works to herself.

"My name was Sadie Schmultz when me and a character named Harrisburg Harry worked a swell badger game," the loser began. "Well, one time we run into a sucker who got tough and we had to work on him. He didn't pass out but he wasn't never the same afterwards. The cops nabbed us and I got two to five. We had a sap mouthpiece, and who else was it but Ferdinand Fingly?"

"Fancy that?" Willie asked.

Satchelfoot Kelly just stared blankly at the wall and dug the point of the D.A.'s fifteen-dollar fountain pen into the wood of the big desk.

"Go on," the D.A. said. "Shut up, Klump!"

"Well, when I got out of the jug," Jonquil said, "I says I will go straight. I changed my name and grabbed a couple night club spots. After awhile I meet Benny Kouf and he falls like a ton of bricks. He gits me a part in a show and then buys out half of the one I was just in and I git the leadin' part. Well, meantime who do I meet on the street but Fingly and he recognizes me. He asks where did I git the sparklers I'm wearin'? I tell him to go and take a runnin' jump into a—it don't matter where. Couple of days later he calls me up and says I better see him or else."

"Blackmail, huh?" Willie cut in.

"Who's tellin' this, meathead?" the

blonde wanted to know. "That's what it was, yeah. He found out I am anglin' for Benny Kouf and asks me does Benny know what I was once. Well, Benny didn't, as he said he would marry class if he ever got married an' I said I was from a swell fam'ly in Back Bay in Boston and all my parents was killed in an airplane accident. So I had to pay this Fingly off who was in deep with the bookies and such. I gave him the stuff Benny give me and I said I was robbed of it. Well, it come to the point where I couldn't cover up no longer, so one night I go to Fingly's joint with the brooch and a diamond ring. This time I take the Roscoe I used in the play. Yeah, the bullet'll match okay. I wore a heavy veil and nobody could tell who I was. I let the dumb mouthpiece have it and scrambled. Any more questions?"

"Covers about everythin'," the D.A. said. "So Fingly put the brooch in the pocket of an old suit where he figured it'd be safe until he could hock it. And Mrs. Fingly gave the suit to William Klump, a private detective. Klump, how did you connect the brooch with Miss Del Rey?"

"A clippin' I cut out of a tabloid," Willie said wearily. "It's too long for me to explain how private detectives reach collusions. Anyways why should I tell the cops my secrets?"

Satchelfoot Kelly got up and groped his way to the door. "Go see him home,"

the D.A. told a cop. "He's in no shape to do it alone. Afterwards come back and git me, Mike."

"Well, somebody better give me a police escort, too!" Willie yelled. "Do I have to draw you a pitcher why?"

"Oh, her?" the D.A. said. "The police matron gave her a mickey, Klump. She won't wake up until sometime tomorrer."

Willie groaned gratefully and mopped his pan with a hanky. "Good evenin', gentlemen," he said. "Too bad, babel!"

"I don't know who is worst off, you or me, you gland case," Jonquil Del Rey sniffed. "I wonder will Benny give me some bail?"

Mrs. Fingly called the Hawkeye Detective Agency the next morning just after the news broke.

"Oh, you darlin', Mr. Klump," she said, "to think you kept workin' for me after what I did! I shall send you a check for a substantial amount as soon as I collect my poor late husband's insurance. Or would you care to collect it in person?"

"You can say that again," Willie said regretfully. "But it better be by mail as I will be confined to my office for several days, I am sure. Excuse me now, huh? The citizen has arrived to put another lock and a bar on my door."

"What a character!" he heard Mrs. Fingly say just before she hung up.

Willie guessed he must be.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

WHAT A SHAMUS

Another Rib-Tickling Willie Klump Howler

By JOE ARCHIBALD

PLUS MANY OTHER CRIME NOVELETS AND STORIES

CAN YOUR SCALP PASS THE
**FINGER-NAIL
TEST?**



TRY IT! Scratch your head! If you find signs of dryness, loose ugly dandruff, you need Wildroot Cream-Oil hair tonic. Grooms hair, relieves dryness... removes loose dandruff!

YOUR HAIR CAN LOOK
LIKE THIS WITH NEW
**WILDROOT
CREAM-OIL**

A LITTLE Wildroot Cream-Oil does a lot for your hair. Keeps your hair well groomed all day long. Leaves no trace of that greasy, plastered down look. Makes hair look and feel good.



CREAM-OIL CHARLIE
SAYS: "IT CONTAINS
LANOLIN!"

TUNE IN...
"The Adventures
of Sam Spade"
Sunday evenings;
CBS Network.



BLACK SHEEP

It all began with a broken
theatre date and it
ended in a baffling and
strange drama of murder!



CHAPTER I *The Bleeding Man*

IT was supposed to be a swell show. I'd paid a scalper twenty-five bucks for the two tickets.

The curtain time printed on the tickets was eight-thirty. At seven-fifty-five I ran up the flight of stairs to Marian Grady's apartment.

I cried, "You look gorgeous!"

She was beautiful. Her dark hair was arranged in gleaming coils, with a big silver comb at one side. You don't often see green eyes along with brunette hair,

but her eyes were startlingly green. In her case the color contrast was terrific.

Her figure was okay, too—tall, leggy, and yet well rounded—I'd never noticed how well rounded before. I'd taken her to movies plenty of times, but never to the theater, and so the evening dress was new to me.

The dress was glistening white, its low-cut bodice fitted in custom-contours, with a small waist, widening from the hips in rippling fullness.

KILL

a novelet



With one hand I
grabbed for the gun

by **DALE CLARK**

A matching white wrap lay loosely on her arms and shoulders which the dress left bare. In one hand, she held a small gold-brocade evening bag.

She said, "Harry, I'm sorry! I can't go!"

She couldn't go?

Brother, that stopped me. Cold. Yes, that hung me on the ropes.

I gaped at her and saw anxiety in her eyes.

She said gently, "I'm dreadfully sor-

ry. Dr. Spiker just telephoned. I have to meet him at once."

Dr. John Spiker was her boss; she was his personal secretary and office assistant.

"Why?" I blurted.

"I have to."

"I don't see why. You put in office hours, don't you? Your evenings are your own, aren't they? Doesn't it occur to Spiker that you might have some plans of your own?" I was coming off those ropes, punching mad. "What right has he to call you up at the last minute and order you to drop whatever you're doing?"

"Harry Wayne, please! This is an emergency. It's much more important than a musical comedy."

THAT stopped me again. Marian was so quiet about it, and so determined.

I said bitterly, "Okay, okay! It's more important than a date with me. He's more important in your life than I am."

I scared myself saying it. Her boss probably was more important in her life than I, who'd taken her to maybe a dozen movies and had bought her half a dozen dinners.

She said patiently, "I told you I'm sorry. I waited to tell you, instead of calling a cab and rushing off before you came."

There I saw my chance.

"You don't need a cab. I'll drive you."

The date was shot to pieces, anyway. I'd lost out to Dr. Spiker this time. I didn't want to make myself an undignified fool in Marian Grady's eyes, to lower myself to a cry-baby level. I could be a good sport about it, anyway.

"Harry, you can't. You wouldn't have time."

"I've got all evening," I said. "You don't think I'd enjoy sitting through that show alone, do you, while you're earning your bread and butter?"

"You could turn in the tickets."

I could turn in the tickets for the box-office price, six dollars each. I'd still be out half the money. No, I might as well be a good sport.

"Oh, forget it," I said. "Anyway, I'm not so sure you could get a cab. And if it's so very important I'd rather be certain you got there."

"Harry, that's sweet, but I couldn't let you."

"I want to."

She hesitated.

"How long will it take?" I asked. "Maybe you'll be through in an hour, and we could go dancing afterwards. It'd be a shame to waste that gorgeous hair-do, and the dress, and everything."

Marian drew the wrap about her throat with one hand, put the other hand on my Tux sleeve. "I shouldn't drag you into this, but all right, I will."

"Where do we go?"

"Out Parkway Drive, between Jefferson and Island."

To tell the truth, my coupe isn't up to the Tux and evening dress standard. The paint job is home-made, spread over fenders that have been straightened so often they're nearly limp. But I've got an aviation-style injector on the fuel line. I leave traffic behind, pulling away from stop signals.

"What's it all about, anyway?"

"I don't know."

And after a moment, she changed that to:

"I'm not supposed to talk about the cases, anyway, but tonight I really don't know. It could be almost anything, I suppose."

Come to think of it, she never had told me anything about Spiker's work, professionally. I had no idea whether he was a heart specialist, or a famous surgeon, or what.

"You're not a trained nurse on the side, are you?"

"No. Why?"

"I just had the thought he might want you to sit up all night with a dying patient."

"It won't be anything like that." Her shoulder squeezed up to mine. "Oh, Harry, you are being nice about it. Most men would have stamped out, and never darkened my doorway again."

SOMEHOW, the conversation never got back to Dr. Spiker.

It was half an hour's drive. Parkway, as the name suggests, follows a city park. The park's on the left side. On the right are apartment buildings. Jefferson is a side street, coming to an end where it enters Parkway. Island Avenue, a long block away, crosses into the park by a bridge over a lagoon, which is fenced in and used as a bird sanctuary.

Halfway down this long block, Marian

exclaimed: "There's the house! Stop!"

I turned into the curb.

"Wait here, Harry."

She jumped out, banging the door shut, and started back up the sidewalk. But instead of staying on the sidewalk, she stepped down to the pavement and ran across to the park side.

I turned my head. On that side of the street, in black shadow spilled by the overhanging boughs of a park tree, was the outline of a large car. I could make out white side walls, and a faint gleam of brightwork. Color, make, or model, I couldn't tell.

Marian Grady vanished on the far side of the big car.

I heard voices, but I didn't hear the words.

She came back, skirt gathered in one hand, high heels clicking. Coming around to the sidewalk, bending to bring her face to the window, she said:

"Harry, it's no use waiting. I'm going to be ever so late, and Dr. Spiker will see that I get home."

"Is that Spiker in the car?"

It struck me as a funny set-up, and I didn't like the tenseness in Marian's voice.

"Yes, of course," she said, after she'd held her breath a moment.

"Why isn't he inside with his patient? Or is he treating the patient in the car?"

"I haven't time to talk about it," she said. "You don't want to make me lose my job, do you?" And next, sharply: "Harry Wayne, will you please go home? I'd have taken a cab in the first place, if I'd known you were going to insist on a quarrel."

Well, what could I say?

I said, "Okay. I just wanted to be sure you were all right here."

"I am. I am."

"Okay."

I drove the half-block to Island Avenue, threw a fast left-turn into the park; braked, reversed, gave it the gun; and right-turned into Parkway Drive again.

The big car was rolling under the street lamp at the Jefferson Avenue corner.

I followed it.

The car, a fat three thousand dollars' worth of blue sedan, ran on Parkway to National Avenue, through the National Avenue shopping district, then turned on Broadmoor Street.

Those streets belong to me as much as the next guy. I stayed behind the big car.

It slowed to a crawl approaching the Braedale Manor. It circled the Braedale. The Braedale is a new apartment hotel, new and arty. Twin fountains splash beside the chromium-and-plate-glass revolving door entrance. The street level floor is cut up into small, costly shops: society photographers, hair stylists, fur shops, exclusive shoe shops, corset shops that call themselves salons.

Light from the shop windows showed me that Marian was doing the driving.

I thought she was looking for a parking spot, but she passed one up, and steered the sedan across the sidewalk onto a ramp running down into a basement garage under the Braedale Manor.

I twisted the coupe into the parking space, hopped out, and made for the head of the ramp. Looking down it, I saw that the sedan had come to a stop. Marian, the white wrap falling away from her shoulders, was trying to get a man out of the front seat.

He lurched into her arms and began slowly sinking to the concrete floor.

I glimpsed his face. His face was a pulpy bruise daubed with blood!

CHAPTER II

Too Many Lies

MARIAN'S slender figure struggled desperately, trying to keep him on his feet. He weighed too much. He slipped to his knees, leaving a wet red smear on her bare shoulder and her white bodice.

I came pounding down the ramp.

Trying to lift him with her hands under his armpits, Marian raised a horrified, frightened face to me. Her green eyes blazed like big emeralds.

"Oh, it's you, Harry!"

I looked good to her, all right.

She cried: "Quick, help me, before somebody comes! In the elevator, Harry!"

I bent over the man, from behind, and wrapped my arms around his ribs. A boost brought him to his feet.

Marian pointed. "Here!"

An elevator ran directly from the

garage up into the building. Luckily, the cage stood waiting for us. Luckily, it was the you-punch-the-button type.

I trundled the man inside, almost stumbling over his feet trailing limp in front of mine. He sagged in my arms, breathing noisily, head tipped far over on one side. He had a scant gray haircut, parted in the middle, originally, but all messed up now.

Marian dragged the elevator door shut, pressed a button, and turned to me.

She was a sight—her hair disordered, the silver comb at a crazy slant, her green eyes enormous. In addition to the blood on her shoulder and bodice, the man's face had printed a plate-sized daub on her skirt.

She said, "Thank God. There's an attendant. He must have been working back at the grease rack, though. He'd have rushed out front if he saw anything."

"Spiker?" I asked, over the man in my arms.

"Yes. Now if we can get him into the apartment without being seen!"

The elevator stopped.

She gestured for me to wait and ran down the hall, to a cross-hallway fifty feet ahead. She looked up and down, and then beckoned vigorously.

Spiker seemed to be conscious again, but not enough to walk, just enough to twitch in my grasp. He didn't make it any easier, and by this time I was growing arm-lame and winded.

I hit on the idea of turning and backing, hauling his weight with his heels dragging on the carpet.

Marian was shakily trying to fight a key into a white birch door, Number 420, with tall modernistic lettering that said: *the spikers*. No capital letters—that made it very floosey.

She got the door open, finally, and switched up lights. I lugged Spiker inside and looked around for a place to put him.

We were in a white, modernistic room with Venetian blinds at the windows, bright watercolor pictures framed around the walls, and chairs made of plastic tubing twisted to support seersucker-striped cushions. The light streamed from floor lamps made of clear glass rods and topped by shiny copper lampshades.

"In here." She ran to another door.

I tumbled Spiker's form onto a bed.

Stepping back, my arms aching in their sockets, I had a really good look at his face—at what was left of it. He had one eye puffed shut. He had a lump as large as a hen's egg on one cheekbone. His swollen jaw might have been broken. The blood came from lacerated skin, from his nose, and from between his lips.

HIS chest heaved as he fought for breath. His shirtfront was both torn and bloody. A bloodstain was growing under his hand on the coverlet.

Marian had broken away, into an adjoining bathroom. I heard water churning into a bowl. By the time I fetched up in the doorway, she was soaking a towel under the tap.

I said: "Look—you've got to get a doctor for this guy."

"Oh, no, Harry. No, oh, no."

I caught her shoulder, and turned her around. "Marian, what is this? What happened to him?"

The water went on drumming into the basin. It was a bad moment—bad, because from the look on her face, I knew she was weighing matters, trying to decide whether to tell me anything.

She said, "Three hoodlums in a car forced Dr. Spiker to the curb. He tried to resist, and they beat him up."

I stared. "Then why all the secrecy? Why couldn't you tell me that out on the Parkway? Why did you have to sneak him home without anybody seeing? Why don't you call the cops?"

"Harry, don't shout. It's a personal matter. Mrs. Spiker and the children are out of town. If she saw anything in the papers, or heard of this on a radio news program, she'd get a terrible shock. Dr. Spiker doesn't want to alarm his wife. She couldn't stand it."

Marian bent over the wash basin, wringing out the towel.

"Who's going to tell the newspapers?" I asked.

"It'd be on the police blotter, for the reporters to see. Dr. Spiker is a prominent man. It'd be in the papers, don't worry."

I followed her to the bedside. I took another look at him.

I said, "But, Marian, you're not even a trained nurse. You're going to have a doctor take charge here, because I'm going to call one."

I ranged out into the apartment, missing the phone if there was one in the

front of the place, finally finding one in an alcove off the kitchenette. By the time I'd flapped open the classified book to Physicians & Surgeons, though, Marian was beside me.

"Harry, if he'd wanted a doctor, he'd have called one instead of asking me to bring him home."

I came right out with it: "Suppose he dies on your hands?"

"Dr. Spiker isn't going to die."

"How do you know?"

"It isn't that bad. He was able to talk to me there in the car. He merely fainted, getting out of the car downstairs."

"Maybe he fainted. But he might have a brain concussion. He might have a brain hemorrhage. He's getting worse, not better."

"Harry, well, I don't know. Let me look at him again."

I RAN my finger down the classified column. Doctors beginning with A all seemed to have addresses on the other side of town, or on streets I wasn't sure of. I found a Dr. Bush, r. 1721 National Avenue. That was within eight or nine blocks.

I said there'd been an accident, and he said he'd come immediately.

Marian met me in the front room. "Harry, I think he just fainted. He's coming to, I believe."

"He could still die of blood poisoning," I pointed out.

She went back into the bedroom. I helped myself to a cigarette from a Chinese jade box, and a light from a jeweled lighter. Blowing out the smoke, I stared uneasily around the room.

Probably an apartment like this rented for three or four hundred dollars a month, and probably there was four or five thousand dollars' worth of furniture and bric-a-brac in this one room.

Dr. Spiker was a big shot.

He wasn't so old, either. Forty-odd isn't old in a man, if he's a successful man.

I wondered about his wife. His wife didn't seem to be here. And forty-odd is often the age the successful ones tire of their wives, especially if there's a glamorous secretary in the picture. . . .

I wasn't jealous—yet—but I was wondering.

A chime played a tune.

"Dr. Bush?"

He'd really hurried. He needed the

business, maybe. He was a young fellow for a doctor, not very long out of the Army, with a discharge button in his lapel.

"This way, doctor!" I steered him into the bedroom.

Spiker's one good eye was open, fixed on us as we came up to the bed. Most of the blood had been blotted off his face by the wet, stained towel Marian held in her hand.

The towel had done nothing to heal his bruises. He looked bad.

Dr. Bush said, "Tck, tck! How did all this happen?"

Now, this is what Dr. Spiker said:

"Doctor, I'm a physician myself. A patient of mine tried to commit suicide this evening. I got the knife away from him, but only after a battle."

He mouthed the words in a feeble voice, but those were his words.

My own voice choked. "What about the three—"

Marian caught and jerked my Tux sleeve.

"Harry, what about the drink you promised me?"

It was crude, but Dr. Bush was bending over unlatching his medical bag, so maybe he didn't notice.

CHAPTER III

Doctor's Ethics

AT a signal from Marian, I tagged her out of the bedroom. We turned into the kitchenette, and I pushed its door shut.

We faced each other. Like strangers.

"A patient beat him up!" I said. "What kind of a gag is he pulling in there?"

"It's—he had to say that. You see, the relationship between a doctor and a patient is confidential. He can say he promised not to tell, and he won't have to tell."

I thought it over a moment.

"Marian, it doesn't make sense to me."

She wetted her lips. "Harry, I'll have to explain what kind of a doctor he is. He's a specialist. He's psycho-analyst."

"Oh, that racket!"

Racket was a word she didn't like.

"What do you know about it, Harry?"

"I've seen movies. It's a bugs-in-the-belfry proposition, isn't it? Crazy people

lie around on couches and tell him their dreams. He claims he can figure out from that what makes them loony, huh?"

She was shaking her head.

"No?" I asked.

"No, you're wrong. You're right about the couch technique, but Dr. Spiker's patients aren't crazy. They are neurotic personalities inhibited by various complexes and frustrations. He doesn't just listen to their dreams; he analyzes the whole content of their lives. Isn't it as important to heal sick minds as to set broken bones?"

I couldn't argue; I didn't know enough about it.

"It's prejudice like yours that makes everything so difficult," the girl said accusingly. "So many people leap to the conclusion that psycho-analysis is a fraud.

"Harry, don't you see? If this story got into the papers, half of the people who read it would imagine Dr. Spiker must be a racketeer. They'd think the beating was just what he deserved. The publicity would reflect on him, and on the whole profession."

I said, "Then it isn't his wife he's worried about?"

"His wife is one reason, and this is another, and there's still a third. Probably the police would suspect this thing is somehow mixed up with Dr. Spiker's practice. They'd want to dig into his professional life. But the things people tell him are sacredly confidential. He probes into the most intimate emotions, passions, hatreds, and loves. He couldn't possibly let an outsider see the case histories in his locked files."

"You just said he wouldn't have to."

"Yes, but the mere suspicion that such a thing *might* even happen would ruin him. It'd destroy the patients' perfect trust in the analyst, which is the basis of treatment. How could they confide in him, if they thought his professional affairs were being investigated by the police?"

I asked: "Then Spiker's throwing a fast curve when he says now it wasn't three hoodlums, but a patient trying to commit suicide?"

"Yes, yes, that's it. As a physician Dr. Bush will help in protecting those patients."

"Okay. I'll take your word for it, Marian."

I opened the refrigerator and got out

two beers—fancy brand, thirty-five-cent-a-bottle stuff.

IN the time it took me to paw open a couple of drawers and locate an opener, Marian had slipped silently out of the kitchenette.

It was good beer, and I figured I'd earned both bottles.

I drank slowly, thoughtfully.

There was something sour about this set-up. I guessed Marian was too loyal to her boss to notice the fact.

I heard voices—Marian's, and Dr. Bush's.

I shoved out of the kitchenette in time to hear Bush saying:

"I'll have to report it. I can't jeopardize my career to shield another man's patient. Dr. Spiker knows I could be jailed. I might lose my license if I failed to report to the police I'd treated him for a gunshot wound."

"Gunshot?"

I gulped the word. I must have sounded like a turkey gobbling.

Dr. Bush turned on me a queer look. "Tck, tck! Surely you knew that hand injury is a contact gun wound?"

He couldn't have read anything but blank, numb bewilderment on my face.

"But doctor!" This was Marian, speaking in a strained, pleading whisper: "Dr. Spiker says the law allows you twenty-four hours to make the report. Can't you at least give us that much time? If for no other reason, so we can prepare Mrs. Spiker for the shock?"

Bush looked at her. Not at her face. At the bloodstained front of her dress.

My throat lumped, watching his expression.

He said, "What you three decide to tell the wife is up to you. I'm afraid I can't be governed by personal considerations."

I half-felt like throwing a punch at him. But, actually, he was right. Wasn't he?

He picked up his physician's bag, stalked to the door, nodded a curt "Good night," before he whisked himself away.

I said to Marian, "That sounds like he thinks you did it!"

Her hands were locked in fists at the sides of the bloodstained gown. Her green eyes stayed fixed on the door Bush had pulled shut.

I walked over to her.

"What's all this about a gun? What made Spiker say it was a knife?"

She said helplessly, "Bush is going to call the police. He won't wait. Probably he'll do it as soon as he gets home."

That was no answer. But why should I bother her for the answer? I marched into Spiker's bedroom.

His face told me nothing. He had maybe eight square inches of face that weren't dressed in bandages. The wounded hand lay quilted in surgical cotton and tape.

To do that, Bush had first peeled off the coat. The coat was heaped on a chair.

SPIKER'S good eye rolled as I fumbled with his coat. A shiny yellow wallet slid from the inner pocket. He had fifty or sixty bucks in the wallet.

"The hoods didn't want your money?" I asked.

"Didn't they?" he breathed laboriously, scarcely moving the bandaged jaw and puffed lips.

"No, so it wasn't a stick-up. Why'd they slug you, Doc?"

"No idea. Said, spoils."

"What?"

"They—said—spoils."

That made no sense.

"Who were they?"

His head moved a half-inch this way, half an inch the other, intended to indicate he didn't know.

"You never saw them before?"

"No."

"Would you know them if you saw them again?"

"Dark," he croaked. "Under trees."

"How'd you get shot, Doc?"

"One man—pointed—gun. I grabbed—twisted—hand on barrel."

"Why'd you tell Bush it was a knife?"

He shrugged.

"Come on, say it!"

"I knew—report. I hoped it—bled enough—to wash off powder."

"Why didn't you want it reported?"

Marian had come to the foot of the bed. "Harry, I told you why."

I asked then, "All this happened on Parkway Drive?"

A nod from him—barely a nod.

"What were you doing, driving along there?"

"Winnie's car. Picked up—at Jim's."

It was hard to make him out. He wasn't using his mummy-wrapped jaw

to form the words. The jaw undoubtedly was getting more swollen and painful by the minute under the bandages.

Marian explained, "Winifred is Mrs. Spiker. The sedan belongs to her. Jim Stanley is her brother, and she often lends him the car. He's probably been using it while she's out of town."

"Jim Stanley." I repeated. "Where does he live?"

Marian didn't know.

"Where, Doc?" I urged.

Spiker mumbled: "Nine—leven—Island."

I walked into the other room. Marian caught up with me at the door.

"Harry, what is it?"

"Three guys he never saw before ran him to the curb and beat the daylights out of him. I'm going to find out if that's true. Otherwise, heaven knows what kind of a jam you're in."

"I'm in?" she exclaimed incredulously.

I nodded. "Bush saw you with blood on your dress. You tried to talk him out of reporting anything. Spiker must have bled like a stuck pig in the car. Whoever puts the cars away downstairs has already noticed it, if he isn't blind. You must have left your fingerprints on the wheel and door handles. Sure, I was with you! But suppose they don't believe me?"

"They?"

"The cops. Don't you know shooting a man is assault with a deadly weapon? Don't you know it means years in the pen?"

Her voice went off key. "Harry, if you think Dr. Spiker would stand by and let me be accused—"

"That's just it. That's just what could smear you. Like this—if they think you were in the car with him, chasing around with him behind his wife's back. You had a quarrel, say if you wanted him to divorce his wife and he wouldn't. You pulled a gun, he tried to take it away from you, you shot him. Say, in a rage you beat him over the head with the gun butt. He'd have to cover up for you, they'd figure. They'd figure you roped me as an alibi witness. Only I'm not such a hot witness. Spiker was shot and slugged before I got to your apartment tonight."

Marian's face burned, paled, and hardened as I talked.

"Harry, if that's what you think—"

"I don't think it, and I'm not going to let the cops think it!"

CHAPTER IV

Man With A Gun

NINE hundred block on Island Avenue is the second block over from the park. The block nearest the park is neighborhood shops. Number 911, on the corner, starts a row of brick apartment buildings.

I entered a small vestibule, floored with shabby rubber matting. The matting ran up three wooden steps to a half-glass door. The walls were of varnished wood wainscoting, in which was set a row of metal mail boxes. The third box from the front contained a tab of ink-printed paper that said *Stanley*. Above the box was a buzzer button.

I thumbed the button.

As a result, nothing happened.

Of itself, that didn't make Spiker a liar. Jim Stanley might have been home when Spiker called for the car, and he might have gone out since. Maybe he'd gone to a movie, or maybe he was bending an elbow in one of the Island Avenue bars.

The vestibule told me he wasn't in the blue chips, like Dr. Spiker, but then I should have guessed it. Guys in the blue chips don't have to depend on borrowing a married sister's car.

I walked back up Island, crossing the drive to the park, and following the park sidewalk.

It was dark under the trees, all right. Still, I could see park benches scattered across the grass. Only about fifty yards away was the pale reflection of light from the lagoon. While I stood there, studying, a man came along the path beside the lagoon, puffing a cigar and playing his cane on the lagoon's galvanized fence. Across the street were lighted apartment windows.

It was a bum spot to waylay a man, considering that people might be wandering along the path, sitting on the benches, or coming out of the buildings across the street.

Maybe the three hoodlums were tough, gun-toting mobsters who didn't care.

I crossed the street and rang doorbells.

"Did you hear a shot outside tonight?"

That got me some funny looks, and some dirty looks, but nobody admitted hearing a shot.

I went into a drug store on the corner, bought a phone slug from the girl cashier, and had plinked the slug into the booth phone before I noticed. . .

I came out fast.

"How'd the blood get on the phone in there?" I asked.

The girl said, "Is there? It must have been that man who had the bicycle accident."

Her story was that a man had come in earlier in the evening, holding a handkerchief to his bleeding face. The story he told her was that he'd been bicycling in the park, had run into a dog, been thrown face-first into the lagoon fence. He'd refused first-aid assistance, claiming he was going to call a doctor.

"What's he look like? Forty to fifty, slender build, brown suit?"

"I really couldn't see his face. Gee, I didn't notice his suit."

"What time was this?"

"Oh, it must have been half-past eight."

HALF past eight! Then the wounded man couldn't have been Dr. Spiker!

"Wasn't it nearer half past seven?" I asked.

She tightened visibly. "Look, mister, what's it to you?"

"Why, I'm from the insurance company. The man has an accident policy. He gave the time as before eight o'clock, but of course he was shaken up and he could be wrong."

"He's wrong. My shift is three to midnight, I get the hour off from seven to eight, and I'd been back on the job twenty minutes or half an hour."

I'd left the coupe in front of 911 Island Avenue. I got into it—and then got out, walked into the vestibule, and gave the buzzer another try.

Nothing happened—at first.

I had the street door open when the other door, at the top of the steps, began chattering.

I shoved it open just as the electrical unlocking mechanism quit its noise.

But I still didn't know which was Jim Stanley's apartment.

I made a wad of my handkerchief to plug the door open.

All his name card said was *Stanley*. The others had names and numbers—2, 3, 4, 5, 6; 22, 23, 24, 26.

He must have Number 25, and that'd have to be on the second floor. It was at the rear of a dark, sour-smelling hallway.

When I knocked, a mumbled voice said something like:

"Come in."

I opened the door, into a dark-brown colored room with drawn shades, shabby overstuffed furniture, and glaring light from a three-bulb chandelier.

"Hello?" I said, to nobody that I could see.

A step sounded close by.

Then I saw him from the tail of my eye. He was waiting behind the door I'd opened. He was short, squat, and wore a day's crust of black whiskers. One sweated arm held a revolver, barrel up.

If I'd been in quietly or if I'd even stood still, I'd have gotten it good.

I jumped.

He brought the gun whizzing down. The barrel caught me midway between the shoulder knob and the left side of my neck. It pounded me to my knees.

I made a sweeping grab which encircled his knees with both arms, although my left arm was numbed into virtual uselessness.

He raised the gun. I had strength enough to push him off-balance, but not off his feet. He held himself up by snatching a fistful of my hair with his free hand. He shook one leg loose, from my weak left arm, and brought the knee-cap up hard under my chin.

My teeth clicked like telegraph keys. My hair felt as if it was leaving my scalp by the roots. He was pushing me away with that hand, cocking the gun for another swing.

Suddenly I knew I couldn't possibly win this fight. It had all happened so fast. And I didn't even know why it had started.

BUT if he clipped me again, it'd be curtains. I blurted—bleated might be the exact word:

"Jim—wait! The Doc sent me."

That froze him.

"Huh?" he mumbled.

"Dr. Spiker. He's in a jam. He wants to see you."

"Yuh-h?" he muttered. Not a very

bright-sounding guy. He sounded so dumb I thought maybe I could pull a fast one.

"Where have you been all evening?" I asked. "He's been trying to get in touch with you."

If Spiker had been here earlier in the evening, I hoped he'd be surprised into saying so.

"What kind of a jam?" he asked, apparently reacting to what I'd said before.

I got up off my knees, and it was hard work doing it.

Looking at the guy, I couldn't give Spiker's in-laws much. He looked more like a freight train hobo than a wealthy doctor's brother-in-law. Day-old black whiskers stuck out of a lumpy face, with an ape-like slope to his low forehead over small bloodshot eyes.

"He had an accident in the car," I said. "You knew he got Winnie's car, didn't you?"

"Huh? Oh, yuh. Yuh."

I wasn't so sure he knew it. He sounded like a low-grade liar, but then maybe he was just a low-grade all-around moron.

"Jim," I asked, "when was the last time you saw Dr. Spiker?"

He wasn't *that* dumb. His look of stupidity changed to brute suspicion and hostility. He took a fresh heft of his gun. "What's the big idea? What's your angle in it?"

"I told you. Spiker wants to see you. My car's out in front. Will you come along?"

Naturally, I was looking for an out. I wanted to get out of reach of his gun. I hoped he'd say no, but let me go back to Spiker.

He said, "Where's he at?"

"Home."

"Anybody with him?"

"Just Miss Grady."

"Who?"

I stared at him in surprise. "Don't you know his office girl?"

"Oh, yuh, her. I didn't place her by the name."

"Shall I tell Spiker you can't come?"

He pulled up the bottom of his thick sweater, shoved the revolver inside his pants. "Nuh-h, I'll go with you."

While I drove to Braedale Manor, he kept a hand out of sight under the sweater, fingers hugging the roscoe. I wondered if he made a habit of waiting

behind doors with a gun in his fist.

He was hot; that much I could figure out. But how did he figure in the slugging of Dr. Spiker?

I found a parking space around at the side of the apartment hotel. "Jim, maybe we better use the back elevator."

"Yuh. Better."

This time we had to ring and wait for the cage, but the attendant seemed to be still busy at his grease rack. We reached Number 420 unseen by anyone. I raised a hand to the press button in the door jamb.

He clipped me.

And it was curtains.

All I remember was a stunning bright explosion, and a plunge into blackness—so fast it hardly hurt at all. . . .

IT hurt enough afterward, when I woke up. But what bothered me most was the stench!

I clawed myself blindly to my feet, fingers raking at close-up walls, in total darkness. I bumped into a door. I got the door open.

I had been shut up in a narrow broom closet, where I'd been hunkered down beside a jug of reeking, chemical disinfectant.

I reeled out of there, staggered along the hallway, and leaned against *the Spikers'* door while I thumbed the button. I was so cockeyed punchdrunk that I didn't realize what a stupid play this was.

It didn't matter for no one inside answered the bell.

So I groped away from there.

It was like riding a merry-go-round in a sea fog, but somehow I got out of the building and across the street to my coupe.

I drove, hunched over the wheel, face almost glued to the windshield, fighting the impression that every other car on the street was carrying a battery of six dancing headlights.

I had brains enough not to park right in front of 911 Island Avenue. I stuffed the coupe into the alley behind the place, went around and unlocked the back hatch, and found a sixteen inch, heavy-headed wheel nut wrench.

"I'll fix you, you flat tire," I mouthed, half-dazed and still groggy.

The building had wooden back steps mounting up to landings loaded with empty milk bottles and garbage cans.

Stanley's apartment was at the rear, consequently with a window and door right onto the landing.

And the window was open, so I crawled in over the sill.

I stubbed my toe into something of a thick yielding, soft, heavy nature. Bending over, I let one hand explore.

My fingers touched a dead face!

CHAPTER V

Rifled Rooms

DRIPPING the wrench, I used both hands, frantically, searching my pockets for a match. I found a pad and scratched a light.

The man at my feet was dead, either shot or stabbed through the chest. He lay there in his shirt sleeves, with his shirt front all in bloody wrinkles which hid any definite hole through the cloth.

Just beyond was an open door. I stepped through it, into the room with the three-bulb chandelier, which wasn't lighted now.

I found a wall switch and clicked on the current. Electric bulbs glowed.

The furniture wasn't overstuffed any more. The upholstery had been slashed open, the stuffings torn out and scattered in wads over the carpet.

I went back to the open door, found another wall switch just inside it and turned it on.

The dead man lay on a kitchenette's linoleum floor. The kitchenette had a good many drawers and cupboards, and they were all open. A pound jar of coffee had been poured into the sink. The cover had been ripped off an ironing board and slung in a corner.

From details like those, my gaze kept coming back to the dead man. He'd been a husky blond, something of a baby-faced blond, not a bad looking guy. The knuckles of his right hand were dark-bruised, a bit of hide missing there. His nails were manicured. He had a nice crease in his pants, and a brightly gleaming shoeshine.

It hit me *he* must be Jim Stanley.

The next development came as a free gift. A telephone rang. It rang five or six times before I traced the sound.

The phone was in the bedroom. The bedroom had been torn completely to pieces, and I had to shuck aside pillows and sheets draped over the instrument.

"Jim?" a nasaled voice asked.

"Yeah. What?"

"You better get dem poils outa sight. De guys are out looking for yuh."

"Who?"

"De poils, yuh bum. De poils!"

"Yeah, but what guys?"

"You ain't Jim talking!" the voice exclaimed and hung up.

It didn't matter to me—he'd said enough. I was wearing a foot-wide grin as I replaced the receiver and headed out into the next room.

But I hadn't gotten halfway across the floor when a key scratched in the door lock. There wasn't time to punch off the lights. I had one heart-beat to yank the wrench out of my pocket and leap over beside the door before it swung into the room.

I held the wrench head-high, ready to bat out brains.

I saw dark hair topped by a silver comb. Marian Grady walked into the room.

I began to say, "Mari—"

THERE was a man with her, a six-footer, hatchet-faced. His gray eyes caught sight of me, the wrench still in my up-raised fist.

His hand dived between his lapels and a gun jumped out. "Drop it!" the hatchet-faced man yelled at me.

All this happened faster than Marian could turn her head.

"Harry!" she exclaimed as I dropped the wrench. "Harry, this is Lieutenant Traffing from Police Headquarters."

The queer thing was her smile. It looked triumphant.

"Bush blabbed, did he?" I asked.

Marian smiled. "He didn't have to. Harry, you were dead wrong about Dr. Spiker. He overheard those awful things you said. He wouldn't take a chance the police might suspect me. He told me to take a cab to Headquarters and report the entire story at once."

Traffing left me no time to feel foolish. His gray eyes stabbed at the torn upholstery.

"What goes on here?" he asked.

"There's a dead man in back," I told him. "I think he must be Jim Stanley."

Traffing strode ahead. He nodded when he saw the corpse and said in a level, all-business tone:

"Check. It's Jim."

"You knew him?"

"Sure. I sent him up three years ago. That time, he forged Spiker's name on a lot of checks."

I stared at Marian. "Oh-oh, Spiker didn't tell that part!"

"Jim Stanley was the family black sheep. People don't advertize such things. You seem to forget," she shook her head, "Dr. Spiker didn't ask you to interfere."

That stung. Traffing left me no opportunity to defend myself. "There a phone here?" he asked.

I had to explain, "It's in the bedroom. It just rang," and tell him why.

Marian's green eyes surveyed me while Traffing talked into the phone. "Poils!" she said. "That means pearls. Dr. Spiker said those men talked about 'spoils.' I'll bet they said 'poils,' too."

Traffing came back to us. He said, "Sure. It sets up okay. Stanley was paroled six weeks ago. He didn't start going straight as he had promised the Spikers. Evidently he tied up with a jewel heist mob. Jim dressed well, and he was good mixer with women, the kind of man the mob could use as a finger man. But he'd double-cross his own shadow if he thought he could get away with it.

"He double-crossed the mob by getting away with more than his share of the loot," the detective ruminated along. "They traced him to here. They knew he was using Mrs. Spiker's car. Dr. Spiker was here tonight, taking that car when he left.

"So what? They made a mistake. They ran the car to the curb, thinking Jim Stanley was driving. In the dark, they slugged Spiker before they saw the mistake. Then they came back here and knocked off Stanley and tore the place apart. I wonder if they found the pearls."

I said, "Not right away. One of the mob was still here when I came up the first time."

Traffing thirsted for details about the short, squatty, sweater-wearing man's appearance.

"A lumpy face and no forehead?" the Headquarters man growled. "That sounds like Jake O'Day. Stanley could

have met him in the pen. But O'Day's no pearl thief. He's a cheap office rat." He frowned. "What became of him?"

I TOLD that part, and Marian cried, "Harry! You didn't take him to Dr. Spiker's apartment? Dr. Spiker was alone there! That man may have killed him for all we know!"

Her eyes accused me, hotly.

"O'Day's no killer," Traffing soothed. "But we'll run over to the Braedale as soon as Homicide gets here."

"Let me try to phone him," Marian begged.

She got no answer. She was frantic with worry. I didn't feel so good, either.

Later we rushed to the Braedale—Marian and Traffing in a police car that traveled faster than I could follow. They were in the apartment minutes ahead of me.

"It's all right," Marian smiled as I came in. "Someone rang and rang, but it took Dr. Spiker so long to crawl out of bed the caller was gone by the time he reached the door."

"Why didn't he answer the phone?"

Marian's finger motioned to her mouth. "He couldn't. His jaw's so swollen he's having to write answers to Traffing's questions."

We went into the bedroom. Traffing was studying a piece of paper. Spiker's right hand was the shot-up one, so the handwriting wasn't good.

Traffing puzzled, "Stanley phoned you he was leaving town? You were to pick up the car behind the building? You didn't go up to Stanley's apartment at all, then?"

Dr. Spiker's bandaged head bobbed faint agreement to each question.

Traffing scowled. "I can't see Jim Stanley giving up the use of a big, fancy automobile! Why didn't he leave town with it?" He turned to me. "Come on down and we'll have a look."

Marian came with us. The attendant had turned the car into a stall near the front. Traffing thrust his head and shoulders into the machine.

"Here's the clincher!" he exclaimed.

His hand had dug in behind the rear seat cushion, and the fingers came up holding a rope of glistening pearls.

Marian said, "Of course. Jim Stanley didn't dare take them with him. He thought they'd be safe, hidden in Mrs.

Spiker's car. Harry, you ought to go straight upstairs and apologize to Dr. Spiker!"

"Harry's going down town and look at some pictures with me," Traffing put in.

It took us twenty minutes to speed downtown, but only three minutes for him to dig up a lumpy face with a number photographed under it.

"That's him," I said.

"O'Day always used to work office buildings. He'd carry in a package that he claimed had to be signed for by the boss personally. While the office girl took the package in, he had a chance to steal stamps and small change and probably snitch the girl's handbag. Maybe Stanley got him to work that game in high-class apartments. He might have been able to swipe a string of pearls while somebody's maid turned her back. He'd have turned the beads over to Stanley to sell, and it looks like Stanley tried to bilk him. We'll find out fast enough when we grab onto O'Day."

"Could I use your phone?"

WITH his permission, I telephoned the Spiker apartment.

"Marian, I can pick you up in about twenty minutes from now."

She said, "Harry, you needn't bother. I'll stay here, in case the doctor needs me."

"Is that his idea or yours?"

"You needn't act that way. You might remember what he's been through."

Traffing listened, a-grin. "You better go home and let her cool off a few days. You're bucking her boss, who earns ten times a year what you do. She's flattered he appealed to her for help, whereas you tried to boss the show."

Why was he giving me the needle?

He grinned. "I could throw you in the can for interfering with police work, and she'd feel loyal and sorry for you. Maybe I better do that little thing."

I beat it, before he took to thinking seriously along that line. Of course, he had needed me to identify Jake O'Day. I guessed that was why he let me drive on home.

I parked in front of the rooming house where I live, went up stairs and pushed open the door.

Jake O'Day was behind the door, with a gun in his fist—the same old act.

CHAPTER VI

Killer By Nature

JAKE shoved the gun into my back ribs, kicked the door shut, and said: "You turned me in to the Johns? Didn't you? Huh?"

"They can hear you all over the house, you fool."

Loud talk or a radio could be heard all over the place, and the landlady was always bawling us out about noise. I said it, because it popped into my head.

O'Day sunk his voice down to an ugly whisper. "You ratted on me, huh?"

I got smart. The whisper meant he didn't want ruckus. He wasn't going to shoot or slug me—until he got what he wanted, anyway. I walked over and parked myself on a chair.

"How'd you find me?" I asked.

"In your leather, dope."

I reached for my wallet. He'd left me the theater tickets. My money was gone.

I sneered. "Trafting said it. You're just a cheap rat."

Trafting's name hurt. He flushed. "You can have your dough back. First, you have to spill what the cops got on me."

"You were in a dead man's apartment. Isn't that enough?"

"Jim was dead before I come in there."

"But you stuck around. You tore the place apart."

O'Day shook his head in denial.

"What were you hanging around for, then?"

"I wasn't. I just got there. He owed me some dough, see? I went up to get it, and there he was, dead."

"You went in the window?"

He hesitated. "Well, yeah."

"How come he owed you money?"

"Fifty bucks I let him have."

I said, "They'll hang you. They know he was leaving town. They've got the pearls."

His bloodshot eyes clouded. He let the hand holding the gun fall. His mouth looked like a carp's.

I asked, "Don't you know what I'm talking about, O'Day?"

"Yeah."

"What was the fifty bucks really for?"

I asked, while he was still in a fog.

"I done a job for the guy. I snitched

a business out of this Doc Spiker's office."

"Business?"

"It was just some papers. I got the stuff out of the files. Jim told me what name to look under. It was a Mrs. Chapman. It's a locked file but Jim had the key. He went in first, that was to get Spiker and the girl in the back of the office. I went in, used the key, and walked out with the stuff."

"Did you read the stuff?"

"No. Jim came right out. It was all long words, anyhow." He had a thought. A big one. "Jeepers, maybe Jim shook the Chapman dame down for her pearls! And he didn't even give me the fifty!"

"So you knocked him off? We'll have to think of something better than that to save your neck. I've got an idea, but we can't work it out sitting here."

I talked him into coming down and getting into the coupe with me.

I DROVE out to Parkway Drive, between Jefferson and Island. I made a U-turn in the middle of the block, and it almost killed O'Day.

"You trying to get us pinched?" he raved. "The neighborhood's over-run with cops on account of the murder."

"Have you got a flashlight?"

"Yeah."

"Hand it over. Come on."

We crossed under the trees, to the walk following the lagoon fence.

"Give me a boost up."

"Jeepers! You don't want to let no cops catch you in there!"

I pulled off my shoes, rolled up my pants, and waded out into the water. O'Day moaned in alarm as I switched on the flashlight. The light didn't help much, the water was too muddy, and I found what I wanted by stepping on it.

The flashlight showed a soggy roll of paper, tied with a string, and weighted with a .32 revolver inside.

I put on my shoes, rolled down my trousers, and climbed back over the fence. O'Day said he guessed they were the same papers.

I said, "We'll ask Spiker. He'll know."

O'Day didn't want to go anywhere near the Braedale.

"You went with me before," I argued.

"I just wanted to find out if you really knew the Doc, and if you was going to see him. I was trying to dope out your angle."

"You rang the doorbell after you slugged me."

He denied it.

I said, "We'll ring it this time."

We did, and Marian opened the door. She'd changed out of the bloodied evening gown into a house-coat that must have been Mrs. Spiker's. Mrs. Spiker was a smaller woman, making the house-coat a curve-hugging fit. I'd have been worried about her running around Spiker's apartment in that revealing garb before, but it didn't matter now.

Resentment came into her green eyes as she saw me, and then alarm as she saw O'Day, who had his gun in his fist.

"Never mind her," I ordered. "Come on."

I marched into the bedroom, hitting up the light by punching the switch as I passed through the door. O'Day followed, shoving the gun into his hip pocket, out of sight.

Spiker raised a bandaged head from the pillow, blinked his one good eye as I tossed the waterlogged bundle on the coverlet.

"There it is, Doc—the lowdown on one of your patients—all her secret passions, jealousies, hatreds, and loves. Everything she ever told you about herself is in there, isn't it? All the intimate, shocking, spicy details that go to make up a psycho-analytic treatment."

Marian sprang to the bedside. "It's Leona Chapman's case history! Where'd you get it?"

"Jim Stanley swiped it from the office. That is, he had it swiped."

"He was blackmailing Mrs. Chapman?" She jumped to the obvious conclusion.

I said: "I don't think so. She might fight back. She might inform the police. I think he could play it much safer than that. He could blackmail Spiker here by threatening to blackmail the Chapman woman. Spiker couldn't call the police. An arrest, a trial, and the publicity would ruin his practice."

ACCUSINGLY I stared into Spiker's good eye. It stared back.

I said, "What could you do? You could use brute force. So you jumped him tonight. And he licked you. He licked the tar out of you. That's why you pulled a gun. He almost got that away from you, too. You got a slug through your hand in the shindy, but

the slug kept right on going through his chest. Isn't that it, Doc?"

The bandaged man exploded: "Good heavens, no!"

I grinned. "So you can talk if you want to?"

Marian's lips made a startled sound beside me.

I watched Spiker, though. "That put you on a hot spot. Your black sheep brother-in-law had been killed in a fight, and you'd been in a fight, and your face would show it for the next two weeks. How could the cops miss on it?"

"That's why you figured out this story you'd been slugged by hoodlums, and why you planted clues to indicate the same hoods killed Jim Stanley."

"You phoned Marian for help, then you threw the telltale papers and gun in the lagoon, then you waited in the car and figured out the fancy details. You sent Marian to Headquarters so you'd have a chance to go back and rip apart Jim Stanley's place. I'd say you were there when O'Day crawled through the window, and as he came in the back way, you went out the front. Then I walked in on him. After the two of us left together, you went back and finished slashing the furniture; it'd look like that happened while you were helpless in bed. The pearls belonged to your wife, and you salted them in the car yourself—of course. Last thing, you started phoning Stanley's apartment. The idea was that Traffing would go out there to check up on Jim Stanley, but actually it was to me you handed that call about the 'poils'—holding your nose while you talked."

He was bracing himself up in bed, shaking his head.

I said, "Here's where you kicked yourself in the teeth. Stanley really gave you a beating. The chances were you couldn't get the car home in your condition. Any traffic cop who spotted you driving in that condition would have stopped you. That's the first thing you thought of, and the first thing you did was phone Marian—and you used Stanley's phone to do it."

"But then, later, Doc, you saw that was a mistake. The call had to come from a *public* phone, if the cops looked it up. You had to go into the drug store, but by that time it was well past eight o'clock, and the cashier who came on duty at eight will swear to it. That

ties you in knots, because I was to pick Marian up at eight to catch an eight-thirty show, and you phoned before I got there."

I'd been wrong.

He hadn't just killed Jim Stanley as a last resort. He was a real killer, for he grabbed for that gun in the bundle of paper to prove it.

Marian screamed.

With one hand I grabbed for the gun and with the other I socked him as hard as I could, square on the bandaged jaw. The bandage didn't soften the punch enough to matter. He fell back on the pillow, and this time he was out cold, and no kidding.

Afterward I told Lieutenant Traffing how I felt about him.

"He pulled a gun on Stanley the first

thing," I said. "Stanley got it away from him, and beat him up for pulling it. During the fight, Spiker managed to get hold of the gun a second time. So I figure he probably had those pearls with him all along, and the only changes he had to make were to explain his own busted face and shot-up hand."

What Traffing said was, "Just let's see those theatre tickets, to prove about the time."

What do you know?

"The scalper made a mistake!" I said. "They're for tomorrow night. Marian, look, we can still go tomorrow night."

Her green eyes widened as she looked at me, and she said, "It can't be as exciting as *this* was."

So I rated all right, after all.



Calling All Crime Fiction Fans!

THE next issue of POPULAR DETECTIVE will bring you one of the finest detective novels in many a year—a whodunit set in New York City, amid the towering buildings of the concrete jungle—THE RADIO CITY MYSTERY, by Kurt Steel. A powerful drama is enacted in the offices and corridors, underground passageways and shops of the city within a city—a drama that will hold you in breathless suspense from start to finish! From the moment Nicholas Halcyon discovers a bandaged corpse in one of the Radio City buildings, the excitement steadily mounts—and the climax delivers a high-powered surprise!

OUR next number will also feature a brilliant novelet—THE BEAUTIFUL ANGEL OF DEATH, by Wyatt Blassingame. This is the story of Sam Bird, who is suddenly trapped in a murder frame—with all the evidence against him. He must solve the case—or else face the consequences, with the hot seat reserved for him! It's a grand thriller.

PERHAPS you're a Willie Klump fan—we hope so. We know you enjoyed the Willie Klump howler in this issue, and next issue we'll bring you another. The title? Tch! Tch! WHAT A SHAMUS, by Joe Archibald—a yarn that packs plenty of laughs! Other short stories by favorite authors will round out a splendid issue.

SMASHING crime fiction in all our companion magazines—every one of them TOPS! Get acquainted with BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, G-MEN DETECTIVE, DETECTIVE NOVEL MAGAZINE, TRIPLE DETECTIVE, THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, THRILLING DETECTIVE, DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL and MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE!

GUNS ARE HANDY THINGS

by
**ROBERT
SIDNEY
BOWEN**



"I tried to stop him,
boss," the lump of
lard said

***Chet Lacey takes on a tough and dangerous chore when
he attempts to bring the straying Alec Keltner home!***

THREE times I watched the office doorknob turn a little, and then turn back. The fourth time was just once too many. I got up from my desk fast and yanked the door open. I don't know what I expected to see out in the hall, but it certainly wasn't that old woman. She was knee high to a grasshopper, with a sweet face lined deep with toil and worry, and hair as white as snow.

"Looking for somebody, Mother?" I asked gently with a smile.

She clutched her shoddy handbag tightly, nodded, and tried to return my smile, but without much success.

"Are you Chet Lacey?" she wanted to know. And as I started to nod, she added quickly, "I'd like to talk to you, Mr. Lacey. It's about Aleo. I'm his mother."

Who Alec was I had no idea, but I

couldn't pop questions at her while she was standing in the hall. I ushered her in and over to my most comfortable chair. She sank into it as though she hoped she never would have to get out of it again. I sat down behind the desk again and smiled some more.

"Alec who?" I asked. "I know quite a few men by that name."

"Alec Keltner," she replied. "He used to work in the Union Garage where you keep your car. Alec has often spoken of you, so I thought maybe—"

She hesitated, stopped, and fumbled with her bag. I did a quick bit of checking. Alec Keltner was a good looking kid about eighteen or nineteen, and a sweetheart on cars. He could fix anything anytime, and he often had my heap of junk. And, come to think of it, I hadn't seen Alec around for a few days.

"Yes, Mrs. Keltner?" I murmured as she went on staring down at her bag.

When she raised her eyes the look in them went straight to my heart.

"I'm worried about Alec, Mr. Lacey, terribly worried," she said. "Four days ago he told me he was taking a new job, a job that would pay him twice the money he'd been getting. He explained it was driving for a man who had several cars, and keeping them in good working order. He said he might not be home that night, but it's four nights, now. I—I don't want to go to the police. I thought that you knowing Alec, maybe you'd—"

SHE let the words slide again, and fiddled with her bag some more.

"I wouldn't worry, Mrs. Keltner," I soothed her. "Maybe Alec had to take a trip for his new boss, and couldn't let you know."

"Yes, yes, that's what I thought," she said and bobbed her head. "But I was telling a friend about Alec's new job, and she said that the man who hired him was a no good and that I shouldn't let Alec have anything to do with him. But Alec is a good boy, Mr. Lacey, and so I shouldn't really worry, I suppose. Only it's been four days and nights. Alec's never been away that long before, without letting me know. What do you think Mr. Lacey?"

"What's his new boss' name?" I asked. "Maybe I know him."

"A Mr. Danny Donnigan," was the re-

ply I got. "My friend says he runs a pool hall and is always in trouble with the police. But how could a man who just runs a pool hall own lots of cars?"

I didn't answer that one. She'd handed me a jolt, all right. Danny Donnigan? Make a snake, a rat, and a skunk into one animal, and you have Danny Donnigan. There wasn't a single thing rotten or crooked in town that he didn't have a finger in. But only a finger, mind you, which he could always jerk out when things went wrong. Danny Donnigan had a slick craftiness you'd find in very few members of the underworld. He also had strings that led to high places, too, which often helped. Danny Donnigan and I had never tangled—yet.

"Donnigan runs several kinds of businesses, Mrs. Keltner," I said. "And what your friend thinks about him is true. He's certainly no boss for Alec. But, what do you want me to do?"

She opened her purse and pulled out a tight little roll of much used bills. She held it out to me.

"Here is thirty-six dollars, Mr. Lacey," she said. "I have a little more in my savings account. Find Alec, and get him away from that Donnigan man. Alec likes you, and I know he'll do what you say. Please, Mr. Lacey! Alec is all I have. He's a good boy. He's—he's just terribly ambitious, that's all."

The sight of that sweet old lady holding out that roll of worn bills made something choke up in my throat. If Alec had walked in at that moment I believe I would have tanned his hide for a solid hour. I shook my head, waved the money away, and got control of my voice.

"Never mind any money, Mrs. Keltner," I said, maybe a little gruffly. "Alec's a friend of mine. I'll look and ask around, and let you know. Just give me your address and phone number, if you have one, and I'll get in touch with you later. Meantime, don't worry. I know that Alec's a good kid, too. And maybe his being away for a few days doesn't mean a thing. I'll get in touch with you. Okay?"

Five minutes later she was gone. I pushed aside some paper work on an insurance fraud I was working on, and reached for my hat. The name, Danny Donnigan, was significant to me.

The fancy sign outside Donnigan's

hangout proclaimed that it was "The Victory Billiard Academy," but inside it was just another poolhall and juke-box emporium. Upstairs in back was where Donnigan maintained his office for his various "enterprises." I went inside, ignored the slanted looks I got from some of the punks lounging at the pool tables, and up the back stairs to Donnigan's office door.

As I was reaching for the knob a ham-like hand shot out of nowhere, spun me around, and jerked my face close to a face that was puffy and red, with two lumps of gray clay for ears.

"Where do you think you're going, bud?" The words were sprayed in my face.

I didn't answer. I never do to that kind of a question. I brought up my right knee to his body and buried my left fist in his stomach. As he toppled back I tagged him dead center on the nose with my right. He hit the hall floor as I turned the office door knob, and pushed it open. I walked in.

Head and shoulders bent over a fancy desk straightened up. Mean, black eyes blinked, and then got meaner. Danny Donnigan's trick little jet black mustache twitched, but his lips hardly moved.

"How'd you get in here, gumshoe?" he snapped. And as he said it a gun came into his hand and got pointed at me.

"Walked in," I said. "If your lump of lard had asked me nice I would have sent in my card. But he—"

AT that moment the door swung open again and the lump of lard appeared.

"I tried to stop him, boss," the lump of lard said.

"Frisk him!" Donnigan snapped. "Then get out of here."

The door guard started to protest but thought better of it. He frisked me, took my German-made Walther semi-automatic and placed it on Donnigan's desk. Then he oozed out of there fast. Donnigan waved his gun at me and toward a chair. I sat down and grinned. Donnigan guessed wrong. His grin was a sneer.

"Don't worry, private eye!" he bit off. "I've got a permit to carry this rod and the legal right to shoot anybody who forces his way into my office. Be sort of a sad ending to your career, wouldn't it?"

"Very sad," I admitted, still holding the grin. "So?"

Maybe it wasn't the back-play Donnigan expected. He blinked, scowled, then reached out and snaked my gun over.

"What kind of a thing is this?" he demanded. "And what hock-shop did you pick it up in?"

"That's a German-made Walther," I told him. "Friend of mine brought it back to me from the other side as a souvenir. A neat little gun. Shoots a twenty-two. Eight of them. Want to know anything else?"

Donnigan didn't reply. He picked up my gun, hefted it a little, and gave it a good looking over. Then he took out a handkerchief and wiped the gun and dropped it back on the desk. He wasn't worrying about me, of course. 'I was too far away from him. I couldn't have made it in a million years.

"Yeah, I do," he suddenly said, and gently tapped the muzzle of his own gun against the palm of his other hand. "What do you want here?"

"A little information," I said after making him wait a little. "A kid by the name of Alec Keltner went to work for you a few days ago. He hasn't been home to see his mother since. She worried. Where is he?"

I always watch everybody closely when I talk to them, because that kind of sharp attention sometimes pays off. Donnigan gave a start and his coal black eyes flickered. I had jolted him. He scowled, stared at me, and made a little gesture with his gun and other hand.

"You trying to give me something, gum-shoe?" he demanded. "I don't know any kid by that name. Besides, I haven't put anybody on the payroll in a month. Who says that, anyway? The kid's mother? She came to you? Why?"

"Yes, to the first three," I replied. "The last because I'm a good friend of the family. I wouldn't want the kid to get into any trouble, Donnigan."

I put a little meaningful edge to the last, and Donnigan didn't miss it. He broadened his sneer, and tried to chuckle.

"You scare me, Lacey!" he snapped. "But I never heard of any kid by that name. I'll ask the boys, though. All kinds hang around downstairs. If any of them has seen him, I'll give orders for him to be sent home to his old lady.

Now, take that fancy rod of yours, and scram. And next time knock! I wouldn't like it twice. Get me?"

"Sure, sure," I said softly and stood up. "And maybe the kid's mother did get the name wrong. Anyway, if you hear anything, let me know, huh? You like this little thing, pal?"

As I spoke the last I picked up my Walther, but I was very careful not to let the muzzle point in any part of his direction. He still had his own gun in his hand.

"Why should I?" he countered. "What's good about it?"

"A handy little thing," I murmured casually, and thumbed off the safety guard. "Shoots extra straight. Like this!"

I PULLED the trigger and the Walther banged, but not loudly. On the sill of a window that looked out on a brick wall was an ash tray. On the edge of the ash tray was a cigarette half smoked. Right after my Walther went bang the half smoked cigarette flew off the edge of the ash tray and disappeared down out of sight.

"See what I mean?" I grunted as Donnigan's eyes flicked from my gun to the ash tray on the sill. "It shoots extra straight. Be seeing you, maybe, Donnigan."

A grandstand play? Well, maybe so. But sometimes little exhibitions like that impress people. A couple of things were beginning to turn over in the Lacey brain and I had wanted to make an impression on Danny Donnigan which he wouldn't forget, I hoped.

I walked out of there leaving him blinking a little, and went down the stairs to the poolhall. I was pretty sure the sound of my single shot hadn't been heard and I was positive when nobody gave me more than a passing glance. Just as I got to the door I noticed out the corner of my eye a cheap little punk ducking into the men's room. He was a young no-good I had nailed a couple of times myself and if the cops ever nailed him he'd probably go up for life. He went by the name of Fin Ryan, with sharp eyes, keen ears, and a long memory. If the police could have gotten Fin Ryan to tell all he knew they could have cleaned up our town spick and span almost over night.

I stopped abruptly and took a half

step toward the men's room. On second thought I changed my mind. If I wanted Fin Ryan later I knew where I could get to him. Right then, there was something else I wanted, and the best place to get it was at Police Headquarters.

I took a cab down there but I was out of luck. Sol Bierman, Chief of Detectives, was off on a week's vacation. However, Sergeant Finkle was on the desk. I went in and asked if I could take a good look at the blotter for the last four or five days. Finkle beefed but presently gave in. Finkle loves Scotch, and there's always some at my place.

Well, there weren't any murders jotted down on the blotter, but there was practically every other kind of crime, mostly stick-ups. One of them was a jewel store robbery that had been pulled off four nights ago, just as the owner was closing up. Two men had entered the store, and before he'd had the chance to get so much as a glimpse of their faces, he'd been slugged into dreamland. The two gents had picked up twenty thousand dollars' worth of uncut stones, and walked out.

That was all on the blotter but I got Finkle to tell me the rest. The store owner had been slugged too hard. He was in the hospital with the chances of living all against him. There had been witnesses but what they had to tell didn't help at all. The two men, seen coming out of the store, were both average height and build and wore dark topcoats, and dark felt hats. They had been seen getting into a car parked near the store. A third person had driven them away. There was no description of the car and no one had taken the license number.

"Another slick job," Finkle summed it up, "pulled smooth, and neat, and fast. We haven't got a thing to work on, and chances are we never will."

Finkle didn't realize he hit the nail right on the head. I didn't have much to go on either. At the moment all I was doing was turning over rocks to see what was underneath.

"Yeah," I said. "Say, about this third guy, the one waiting at the wheel—got any report about him?"

Finkle shook his head. "Nope. Not a thing. And now you tell me, pal. Whatcha got on the fire?"

"Just fishing around, Sarge." I nodded to him and walked out of there.

ON the sidewalk out in front I took stock. It didn't take long, for it all added up to nothing but cobwebs. But there was one solid fact. The discovery that I was looking for Alec Keltner had given Danny Donnigan a jolt. I knew this because Donnigan had lied to me. Had Alec disappeared because he had found out something about Donnigan—something that Donnigan didn't want him to know? I held hard onto that last, knowing Donnigan as I did. His name had been mentioned in connection with a couple of big jewel lifts a few years back but he hadn't been tagged for anything. Another item was that this wouldn't be the first time Donnigan had used a young fellow to his own advantage, and then left the youth holding the bag.

However, adding something up and proving it, is a tough job. No one knows that better than a private detective. How was I going to get the proof I needed? Since no bright ideas were forthcoming, I decided to go back to my office, finish the paper work on that insurance fraud case, and then go on fishing around.

But, of course, I didn't go back to my office. When something is bothering me, I can't just shove it and give my attention to other things. I just have to get the thing untangled, that's all. So I retraced my steps to a spot across from the Victory Billiard Academy where I could see what was going on. The observation post I selected was a little gin mill with a front window that wasn't clean, but clean enough to see out. Not wanting to die of carburetor poisoning I drank beer, and stuck to it.

After sipping three goblets of bad brew, I got a break. Fin Ryan came out of the poolhall, turned right and started along the sidewalk. I gave him a half a block lead and followed.

After trailing him for a half dozen or so blocks I surmised Ryan's destination. Sure enough, he turned, mounted the front stoop of a run-down brownstone rooming house. Evidently he lived there.

I was only a dozen steps behind him when he went through the door and right at his heels as he started up the rickety stairs. He heard me, and whirled around.

"Relax, Fin," I said quietly as the features of his rat-like face began to jump around. "Just want to talk to you.

Let's go on up to your room."

"I don't talk to gum-shoes!" he snarled. "Particularly not to ones like you!"

I grinned, and absently rubbed my clenched right in the palm of my left hand.

"Okay, Fin," I said softly. "Suit yourself."

I could see that he didn't just know what I had meant by the remark, and it scared him. A professional criminal always lives in fear, and just saying "Good morning" to a punk like Fin Ryan makes him wonder what's up. Anyway, Ryan changed his mind quick. He ran his tongue across his dry lips, and nodded.

"Okay, come up," he quavered. "It's a free country."

As a matter of routine I was all eyes as Fin Ryan let us into his room, but he didn't try anything funny. And, incidentally, once we were inside I really was all eyes. The place was fixed up real fancy for a rat like Fin. The closet door was open and I counted five nice suits on hangers, plus a snappy beach robe and sport slacks. I glanced at Fin, and grinned.

"Business good, eh?" I murmured. "You must have been doing quite a few odd jobs lately for Danny."

Ryan smirked, flung himself into a chair and fished out a cigarette. The lighter he touched to it was better than the one I've got.

"Okay, okay," he grunted through a cloud of smoke. "What do you think you've got on me?"

"A lot!" I snapped at him. "But I'm saving it for another time, Ryan. This is strictly social. I'm looking for a kid, a good friend of mine. He had a good job, but I guess he got tired of the hours and decided to see the town. His name's Alec Keltner. Have you seen him around? Maybe shooting pool with some of the boys?"

I THOUGHT Ryan's face tightened up, but I couldn't swear for sure. I was still only turning over rocks to see what was underneath.

"Alec Keltner?" he repeated. "Nope. I don't know any kid by that name."

"Different from you, Fin," I said easily. "Well built, and good looking. And plenty of brains. A very sharp boy who could go places on either side of the tracks. Know what I mean?"

Ryan's face quivered with rage, and I thought for a second he was going to fly off the handle, but he didn't.

"Funny guy, ain'tcha!" he snarled. "Well, what you think doesn't bother me at all. So scram, gum-shoe! I gotta doll up for a date."

I could have stepped over and knocked Fin loose from his big ears but that wouldn't have helped. I knew Fin Ryan. I knew that I could take him apart limb by limb and he would never spill a word I wanted to know. With his kind you have to trap the truth out of them, not bat it out. So I stood up and made a little gesture with one hand.

"Okay, Fin, I was just asking," I murmured. "I asked Danny Donnigan the same question, but he thought it was funny. He said I should ask you if any kid was hornin' in on your job. You've handled Danny's cars a long time, haven't you?"

It was a shot in the dark. I kept my eyes on Fin Ryan's face. The blood slipped away from under the swell tan he had. His eyes narrowed.

"What do you mean, hornin' in on my job?" he rasped. "Just because I've been away a couple of weeks resting up don't mean that some little punk can get me shelved."

Fin Ryan clamped his thin lips shut, but he had said too much. We both knew it. I walked over close to him.

"Yes, Fin?" I murmured. "Some young kid maybe did a very nice job while you were on that vacation—and Danny's pretty pleased? Is that why he laughed when I asked, huh?"

Fin Ryan struggled to master his anger.

"Bushwah!" he snapped. "I dunno what you're talking about. I'm on Donnigan's payroll, and I'm staying there. Go ask him if that ain't so! Now, get outa here."

Another taunting question was on my lips, when suddenly a couple of things rose up and I saw a great light. Yep, dope that I was, I had been admiring Fin's swell tan and not giving it a thought. And now that he had mentioned having been away on vacation, lots of things began to click. One was realization that Danny Donnigan owned a beach house down on the East Shore. And another was that Fin Ryan did have one claim to being allowed to live in this world of ours. In short, he knew autos

and their engines like nobody's business! His trouble was that he had never worked at it for honest profit.

I quickly decided to turn over one more rock, just to see.

"Nice place Danny has on the East Shore, isn't it?" I said. "Calls it the Eagle's Nest, doesn't he?"

"The Breakers," Fin said. "And it's all right. So what?"

"So nothing, Fin," I said with a gesture. "Maybe if I'm down that way some time, I'll give it a look. Yes, sir, maybe I've got a thought there. Keep your own nose clean, Fin. So long!"

Without waiting for Ryan to make a crack, I walked out the door and down the rickety stairs to the ground floor and the street.

Out on the sidewalk I looked at my watch and decided to grab something to eat, and then carry out a plan I had conceived. This was to get out my car and take a quick run down to Danny Donnigan's East Shore place to see if, just by any chance, somebody else was getting a nice sun tan like Ryan had, and waiting until the boss summoned him back to town.

AFTER paying my dinner check I went on to the Union Garage, had the attendant on duty get out my car and fill it up with gas and oil. Then I slipped the attendant three bucks and started out.

Fifteen minutes later I stopped near the Victory Billiard Academy, got out to buy a package of cigarettes and give Donnigan's boys a good chance to spot me and then drove away, heading toward the bridge which is the route to the East Shore.

Well, when I was about a mile the town side of Route 7 I pulled over in front of a sporting goods store that was open. I went in and bought a box of American-made twenty-two bullets. Then I jumped in my car and got going again, keeping a keen eye on the rear view mirror. But I wasn't certain, yet. But when I hit Route 7 and traffic became fast and thin I got my chance to make sure.

Check! A car that had the fender parking lights on, as well as the driving lights, eased up to about two hundred yards behind me, and clung right there. I had seen that combination of lights in the city traffic. It was a tail, all right!

Now one other item: how many guys were in the car? I had a hunch there was just one.

Well, when I was five or six miles from where Route 25 branched off from Route 7, I ran into a traffic jam. Everybody had to slow up and get into line. A couple of State Troopers were directing traffic into two lines, beginning with the car directly in back of mine. This was a break for me as they signaled for the driver to swing his car out and speed up. He did, but I got a flash glance at him as he whizzed past. It was Donnigan.

I soon lost him in the traffic beyond. I didn't mind. I really felt good for the first time since Mrs. Keltner had walked into my office.

Well, when I got past the road block, the traffic had thinned out again. And soon I saw that Donnigan had pulled a neat one on me. I didn't know that I had passed him, but I had. There was his car with main and fender lights again, about a hundred yards behind me.

Then, presently, we came to where Route 25 branched off to the right. And on impulse I decided to give Donnigan a break, if he wanted it. I guess maybe he did. I swung off onto Route 25, the long way to Bayville, but he kept right on Route 7, the short way. Fair enough! My play was to let them have a reception party waiting for me on arrival.

A few miles down Route 25, I pulled over to the side and parked. Taking out my Walther I unloaded it, and then reloaded it with the American made twenty-two slugs I'd bought. Before shoving it back in my pocket I hesitated, and I sweated some, too. Could be the Lacey was the world's prize fool. Yet, I'd have to play it the way I planned. I swore softly and jammed the Walther back into my shoulder holster.

Thirty minutes later I reached Bayville. From the old duffer who ran the drug store I found out that The Breakers was the last place at the end of a three-mile beach road. I went outside and drove those last three miles. Three miles, I might add, I never hope to drive again. Right straight through solid woods that could hide a whole army waiting for you. And as I didn't want to signal my approach too far in advance, I dimmed my lights.

Finally I saw the lights of a cottage up ahead. I pulled off the road, killed

my lights and engine, and started walking till I was a stone's throw from the cottage. It wasn't too big, and was a one floor affair. A screened in veranda ran the full length of the front of the house. If you were a good jumper you could jump from the front steps right out onto the wide sandy beach.

The urge to take out my gun was great, but I resisted the temptation. I walked up close to the house, then veered around toward the rear. I had taken maybe a half dozen steps when something blunt and hard was jabbed into the small of my back.

"I told you I wouldn't like it twice, Lacey!" Donnigan said behind me. "Lift them!"

I DID, and he reached over with his free hand and snaked away my Walther. I stood very still, and didn't say a thing. Donnigan chuckled.

"You private-eyes, what dopes!" he sneered. Then prodding me, he added, "Get going into the house. You came looking for a guy, didn't you? Well, let's find him. Maybe he's here."

Donnigan chuckled some more, but I didn't do anything except walk as directed around to the veranda door and through it to the main house door. That led into a combination living and dining room. The rear and the right side were partitioned off into kitchen, bath, and bedrooms I suppose. I didn't look to make sure. What caught my eye and held it was young Alec Keltner sprawled out on the couch. He was dead to the world, and there was a turned over glass near his dangling fingers. Beside it was a bottle of Scotch with the contents half gone.

And sitting in a near by chair, thoroughly enjoying a drink for himself, was the lump of lard. He leered at me. Danny Donnigan gave him some orders.

"His car is parked down the road," he said. "Go put it where it won't be found for a spell. Then come back. I'll be all through by then. Beat it!"

The lump of lard gulped down the last of his drink, and bounced up out of the chair and was gone. As the door banged shut, Donnigan slid around in front of me. He had put his own gun away, and was holding mine.

"I always said you'd outsmart yourself one day, Lacey," he told me. "And, I guess this is the day. Right?"

"Could be," I said with a shrug. And then nodding at young Keltner, I said, "That angle I didn't guess. He never drank, so why did you drug him? And by the way, that jewelry store owner died tonight. Who slugged him? You or your lump of lard?"

HE shouldn't have answered that but it didn't worry Donnigan. He thought he was sitting pretty.

"Little Bobo, who just left," he said in a nasty voice. "And I'm almost tempted to let him hang one on you, Lacey. However, I got a better idea. You had a bum hunch tonight. You played right into my hands, Lacey!"

"Yes?" I murmured.

"Check!" he snapped. "I got lots of nice little jobs for that kid over there. But he needs a bit of training, see? That car job the other day sort of unnerved him, so I sent him down here to relax and realize a few things. One being, that little punks don't walk out on Donnigan once he puts them on the payroll. Then you stuck in your big nose. At first you did have me worried but I got a nice little idea, and I came to love you like a pal."

"What idea?" I said, and looked at my gun in his hand. And I even came up on my toes a little.

"A perfect way to keep that little punk in line!" Donnigan snarled. "He's got hands and brains I need in my business. With a murder rap hanging over his head he won't be any trouble at all. Your murder, Lacey!"

"I don't get it!" I mumbled.

"Simple!" Donnigan laughed. "When he comes out of that he's going to find you dead with your gun in his hand. He won't remember, of course. So Bobo and I will remind him, see? We'll tell him how you got a line on him and trailed him down here. You were his friend so he could catch you off guard. And he wasn't too drunk to do that. Never touched a drop, huh? Well, maybe not until he came down here to relax. I had Bobo show him how to relax. Not used to it, he took too much. And maybe Bobo did help him along. Anyway, he'll stay right in line after we pin your murder rap on him. We'll stick you where you'll never be found. But we'll keep your gun with his prints on it, and— Oh yeah?"

That last was because I was diving

forward. He jerked the trigger of my gun, but that was all. He jerked it again, but it didn't go off. Then he started to swing it at me and go for his own gun with his other hand. No dice! It was much too late then. I was all over him like a tent. I got in a bone crusher to the side of his neck. That did it. It momentarily paralyzed him stiff as a board. He went flat to the floor. He had hardly bounced before I'd wrenched my gun from his hand and clouted him behind the ear plenty hard.

Fact is, I gave him a second belt to make very, very sure. Then I took his gun from his pocket and went out front. In about six minutes Bobo, the lump of lard, came out of the shadows. He didn't see me, but I saw him. I also belted him as he walked by, caught him, and carted him back into the cottage. My final step was a phone call to Finkle asking him to send some of the boys out there fast.

After that I tied up Donnigan and Bobo with some rope I found. I didn't bother with Alec Keltner. From long experience I knew that nothing would wake him up for another seven or eight hours at least. So I sat down to wait.

Well, that's about all, except for a couple of loose ends. Alec's story was just what you'd guess. He thought he was getting a level job at good pay. Sure, he meant to keep straight. He knew his way around, just like lots of kids his age think they do. In court the judge gave him a lecture Alec will remember the rest of his life, then put him on probation, responsible to me.

Being rats, Donnigan and Bobo, of course, went at each other's throats in court. The jeweler didn't die. He got his stones back, and Donnigan and Bobo got fifteen to twenty up the river.

Oh, no, that wasn't any reckless dive I made at Donnigan when he was holding my gun on me. Believe me, the Lacey really does play it safe when he can. I guess I didn't mention it, or maybe you know guns real well, huh? Anyway, for those still wondering, a German made Walther takes twenty-two ammunition that is *center* fire. And American made twenty-two ammunition is *rim* fire. So—you see? Danny Donnigan had a gun that was actually loaded, but he just couldn't fire it off. As I had told him in his office, that Walther was a handy little thing!

The daily press brings you the story of crime as it occurs, day by day—but to understand the true nature of criminal acts, the perspective of time must be applied and the first impressions of a case clarified and analyzed. To delve into the motives and psychology of public enemies we bring you—

LITTLE KNOWN FACTS *about* WELL KNOWN CRIMES

This, the first in a new series of behind-the-scenes true stories, tells the thrilling and inspiring tale of the men who fought the most vicious of gangsters!

TWICE within a period of nine months recently the name of John Dillinger cropped up in the news. The first occurred when the "Woman in Red," who put Dillinger on the spot, died in an obscure town in southwestern Rumania. The second time involved another death, that of Edward J. Dowd, a former FBI agent who aided in planning the trap for the former Public Enemy No. 1. Oddly enough, in all the words that have appeared about Dillinger almost nothing has been said of the man who really engineered his downfall—Sergeant Martin Zarkovich, of East Chicago, Indiana.

It is strange how women and informers played such important roles in the brief but lurid criminal career of Dillinger, a fact Zarkovich well understood. Few persons realize that Dillinger was a real outlaw for just thirteen months. In 1924, as a trembling youth of twenty, he was sent to prison for taking part in a cheap and amateurish burglary. Nine years later during the closing days of May, 1933, he was released.

Prison served Dillinger as a crime school instead of rehabilitating him. There he came under the tutelage of four desperate thugs—John Hamilton, Russell Clark, Harry Pierpont, and Charles Makley, who taught him all they knew. And Dillinger was an apt pupil.

In return, he promised he would help them escape from jail when he was freed.

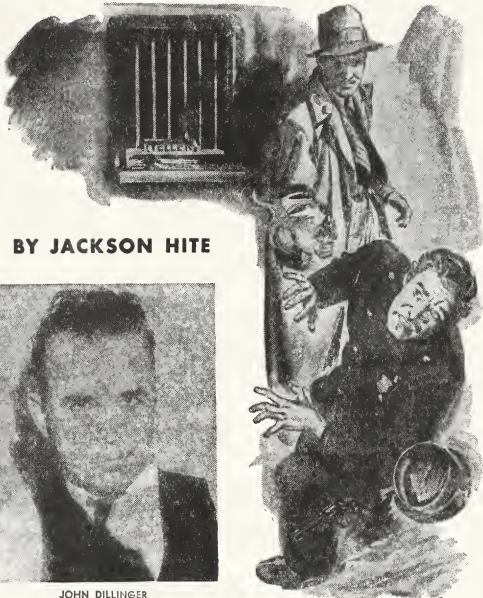
Within a few weeks after his release, Dillinger contacted friends of the four men in prison and turned bank robber. He was recognized while taking part in stickups of banks in Indiana and Ohio.

In September after holding up a bank in Bluffton, O., he hid out in the apartment of an attractive divorcee in Dayton and for the first time an informer crossed his path. A man who was ousted in the affections of the pretty divorcee by Dillinger's arrival sent a tip to police. Dayton officers crashed the woman's flat and picked up Dillinger before he had time to move out of any easy chair.

One Jail Break Deserves Another

He was taken to the county jail at Lima but his stay there was short. Dillinger had not forgotten his promise, and before his arrest had smuggled guns into the Indiana State Penitentiary at Michigan City and his four tutors in crime broke out. These friends now came to his rescue, killing the sheriff at the Lima jail and releasing him. This daring jail delivery in October, 1933, brought Dillinger's name to the attention of the country for the first time.

His name seldom was to slip from the front pages for the next nine months.



BY JACKSON HITE



JOHN DILLINGER

the story behind

DILLINGER'S DEATH

With the group united now for the first time outside of prison walls, and augmented by such gunmen as "Baby Face" Nelson and Homer Van Meter, the Dillinger gang became the scourge of the mid-West. Bank after bank was held

up, and innocent men were ruthlessly shot down if they had the misfortune to get in the way. The mob operated with high-powered cars that could outdistance any pursuers, and they left little to chance, thoroughly casing each job.

While harassed police of various states were looking for him, Dillinger and his crew lived at swanky resorts and apartments on the assumption that police never would look for them in such places. They always traveled with women in order to maintain a front of being respectable business men on a vacation.

The gang was exceedingly bold. In casing one bank Dillinger and Van Meter posed as NRA officials and spent some time with an unsuspecting banker going over his financial records so they would know exactly how much money and securities would be on hand at the time of the robbery.

Modus Operandi

During a job they made little effort to conceal their identities. They didn't even bother to wear masks. While entering one bank Dillinger bumped into a depositor and apologized. The gangster was wearing a lodge pin in the lapel of his coat, a subtle touch to give him an air of respectability as he moved about on the streets. The man saw the lodge pin and, with a broad smile, welcomed his fraternal brother.

"I'm Simpson of the Sunset Lodge," he said holding out his hand.

"And I'm Dillinger of the Indiana State Pen," the gangster replied, with a grin.

He then produced a gun and told the startled man to hold up his hands.

On January 15, 1934, while robbing the First National Bank of East Chicago, Ind., Dillinger shot and killed Patrolman William O'Malley. Actually, this was the beginning of the end for him since it placed the relentless Sergeant Zarkovich on his trail.

Because Zarkovich and O'Malley had been friends, Captain Timothy O'Neill of the East Chicago Force removed the sergeant from all other duty and assigned him to the specific task of running down Dillinger. While it was true that many officers from various states were seeking the desperado, Zarkovich, thought up a plan and stuck to it. He reasoned that his best bet was to get somebody, either in the underworld or on its fringes, to finger Dillinger, and he concentrated in building up private informer contacts.

Two weeks later it appeared that his assignment had come to a close. Dil-

linger was captured in Tuscon, Arizona. Brought back to stand trial for the murder of officer O'Malley, he was lodged in the Lake County jail at Crown Point, Ind. Several weeks later Dillinger escaped and fled in the sheriff's car.

Beware The F.B.I.

This was another error by Dillinger. Up to this moment he had avoided breaking any Federal law and so the F.B.I. never had been able to enter the chase. Robbing national banks at that time was not a Federal offense. But by stealing the sheriff's car and taking it across a state line, Dillinger violated the Dyer Act and the G-men gladly took up the hunt.

Legend has it that Dillinger escaped from Crown Point armed with a wooden gun he whittled from a washboard. FBI agents discovered that his latest girl friend, pretty Evelyn Frechette, an attractive cabaret singer, had visited him several days before the escape. According to the underworld grapevine, she carried a lot of cash with her, which was much more effective than the wooden gun in helping Dillinger crash out.

Zarkovich resumed his task of tracing Dillinger and so did the FBI, each working independently. The G-men, with their splendid nation-wide organization, quickly picked up the trail and raided an apartment in St. Paul, Minn., where Dillinger had been hiding out with Evelyn. They just missed the couple.

Later Evelyn was spotted in Chicago and arrested, but she refused to tell where her sweetheart was holed up. She was convicted of harboring Dillinger in St. Paul and sentenced to two years.

Dillinger, Baby Face Nelson and others of the gang were tracked to Little Bohemia, a Wisconsin resort, but as a group of officers advanced on the hide-out, several dogs barked, giving the men inside warning. During the gun battle that followed Baby Face Nelson killed a Federal agent, and several other officers were wounded by the mobsters who escaped. Dillinger's car later was found in Chicago, and the grim hunt for him was concentrated in that city.

A Change Of Face

News leaked out that a plastic surgeon had bobbed Dillinger's nose and performed other facial surgery to change his appearance. Stool pigeons in the

underworld verified the information, but at the same time were unable to tell where Dillinger was or what he now looked like.

Zarkovich didn't let this news disturb him. Somebody in the underworld knew where Dillinger was, and the Sergeant was out to find that somebody. His contacts finally led him to Anna Sage, an attractive statuesque brunette, whose real name was Ana Cumpanas, and at last his lengthy undercover work was to pay off.

On Sunday, July 22, 1934, Zarkovich received word that Anna Sage was willing to finger Dillinger if he could be captured away from his secret hideout. Actually Anna was living there with him. Dillinger had teamed up with her after Evelyn's arrest, and he even carried Anna's photograph in his wallet.

Zarkovich got in touch with Melvin Purvis, Chicago area F.B.I. director, who arranged for Agent Dowd to work with the sergeant. It was known that Dillinger was movie crazy, and a message was sent to Anna Sage that she was to go with Dillinger to a movie after dark. The Biograph Theatre on Lincoln Avenue, a small neighborhood house in Chicago, was the rendezvous. Anna agreed to wear a bright red dress that would identify her.

Zarkovich and Dowd worked out final plans. Several East Chicago officers who knew Anna were to be stationed on the route to signal her approach. Dillinger was to be allowed to enter the movie house, where incidentally, "Manhattan Melodrama," a gangster picture starring Clark Gable and Myrna Loy, was playing. The officers reasoned that after sitting for several hours in a darkened theatre Dillinger's reactions would be slower.

The Woman in Red

That night waiting men trained their eyes on the theatre from various watching posts. Purvis took over active command, assisted by Dowd and Sergeant Zarkovich. The entire area was honey-combed with detectives and Federal officers. Two women and a man sauntered up the street. One of the women was wearing a bright red dress. The East Chicago officers watched the woman in red as she moved along with the man. One of them lit a cigarette. The woman was Anna Sage.

The officers studied Dillinger as the mobster purchased three tickets at the box office. His chestnut hair had been dyed coal black and he had grown a trim moustache which also was jet black. He had given himself the appearance of a meek clerk by wearing a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses and a round straw hat. The plastic surgeon had done his job well. The shape of Dillinger's nose had been changed and the skin on the face tightened, raising his cheeks and adding new contours to his face.

The next two hours crawled by for Purvis and Zarkovich who were keeping out of sight because of the danger of Dillinger recognizing them. Men were posted to guard the alleys in case Dillinger came out of the theatre from a side exit. Others were in and around the lobby so they could mingle with the outcoming movie goers, and at the same time form an unobtrusive cordon about the elusive gangster.

The Last Gun Fight

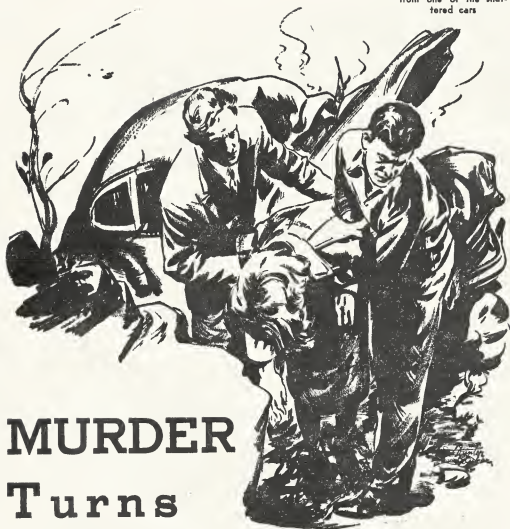
Finally Dillinger emerged and the men began to close in. Ann and the other woman became separated from him. Whether Dillinger became alarmed at this or whether he saw the approaching men is not known, but he definitely sensed danger and sped toward an alley, yanking a gun from his pocket. As he did, the waiting officers opened fire and Dillinger sprawled dead on the sidewalk, just thirteen months and four days after he had stepped out of prison, no longer a callow youth.

The public assumed that the Woman in Red turned in Dillinger because of the \$70,000 in reward money offered for him, even though women who associate with underworld characters have proved to be remarkably loyal to them. But there is another factor that Zarkovich knew, and of which he took advantage. Although Dillinger lived with Anna Sage after Evelyn Frechette's arrest, he couldn't forget the cabaret singer and made maudlin speeches about her whenever he drank.

Dillinger failed to realize that Anna Sage was at an age where she was afraid of losing her good looks and was extremely sensitive. She resented the gunman's babbling about Evelyn. Zarkovich cleverly played on her emotions, aroused her jealousy and this, coupled with the

(Concluded on Page 102)

Henry Shay had helped
to take the woman out
from one of the shattered
cars



MURDER Turns the Curve

By BRUNO FISCHER

IT was another mess. The two-toned sedan was twisted metal a hundred feet below the road. It was still smoldering, though ten minutes ago the volunteer fire truck from Fort Hals had doused it with chemicals.

Henry Shay shifted his gaze to the canvas sheet spread on the grass. Under the sheet lay the woman who had been

driving the sedan. He had helped her out, and his stomach was still queasy.

For five weeks now, since the college term had ended, Henry Shay had been a deputy sheriff, and he wasn't sure that he liked the job. Too many people were getting themselves killed in auto accidents.

He turned from the wrecked car and

When Is An Accident Not An Accident?

the dead woman and started up the slope.

The second car, a coupe, was up on the road. The impact of the crash had jammed its motor back against the seat. Somehow the driver had lived through it, but whether he would live long was a question the hospital interne hadn't been able to answer. Still unconscious, he'd been rushed away to the Fort Hals General Hospital.

Cars and trucks were lined up in both directions from the curve. This was State Highway 37, the main road between Rexton and Fort Hals, and at five in the afternoon it had plenty of traffic. There was just about enough room for cars to skirt around the wreck but most of the drivers had stopped off for some ghoulish gawking.

Henry crossed the road to where his uncle, Will Shay, the sheriff, was speaking to State Trooper Robinson.

"His name's George Archer," Uncle Will was saying. "His driver's license gives a Detroit address, but there was a letter addressed to him in the Crown Hill section of Rexton. I guess he's one of the summer people staying there." He flapped a hand toward the slope on his right. "As for the dead woman, she hasn't been identified yet."

Robinson said: "Lucky thing there was only one person in each of those cars."

Henry snorted bitterly. "Lucky! Isn't one dead and one dying enough?"

THEY looked at him, and Henry flushed. He had curly brown hair and pink cheeks that would always make him look too young to be taken seriously. He knew that they were thinking that he was just a college boy playing policeman during his summer vacation, who couldn't take violent death in stride.

"Henry's had his fill of fatal accidents this week," Uncle Will explained to the trooper, as if apologizing for him. "Matter of fact, so have I. Three smash-ups in seven days. Six cars involved, and five people killed, not counting the injured. What's the matter with these fool drivers?"

Robinson ran his eyes over the sharply curving road. Driving like mad and not even slowing down for blind curves like this on a two-lane highway. You'd think people were out to commit suicide."

"Or murder," Henry blurted.

The heavy-set trooper and the chubby sheriff again looked at him.

"What did you say, Henry?" Uncle Will asked.

Henry hesitated. He wasn't sure why he had blurted out that word. Then he said: "It was *practically* murder."

Uncle Will nodded. "Sure. A driver who takes chances behind nearly two tons of car going fifty or better is no better than a murderer." He glanced over his shoulder. "There's the truck driver who saw it. Haven't had a chance to get his statement down yet. Where's your notebook, Henry?"

A short distance beyond the curve, the truck driver stood smoking a cigarette beside his dump truck. When he saw the three men approach him, he flicked away his cigarette and ran the back of a hairy hand over his mouth. He was a wiry man with a pinched face which looked as if it was never cleanly shaven.

Henry wrote down what he had to say.

His name, the truck driver said, was Al Spruce. The truck was his own. It was loaded with cinders he was hauling for a man on Pine Lane who wanted them spread over his driveway.

"Around thirty minutes ago I was crawling north," Spruce said. "It ain't much of a grade, but anything's tough for this old truck of mine, especially when it's loaded, and I was going up maybe ten miles an hour. I seen this sedan shooting up behind me."

"The blue sedan?" Uncle Will asked, glancing down the slope.

"Yeah, the one the lady was driving. Through my mirror I seen it doing fifty or maybe sixty. I was still about a hundred feet from this curve, and I couldn't see around it. That car in back of me was even blinder. But it didn't slow down one bit. It swung out around my truck, to the left side of the road, and was passing me just about when we both reached that part of the curve there. I seen then that it was a lady behind the wheel, and I remember thinking what a dope she was to take such a chance. I remember thinking that was a woman driver for you."

Trooper Robinson growled: "Those fools! How many times I see them passing cars on blind curves! Some are lucky and some aren't."

"Well, this lady wasn't," Al Spruce

said. "I was sitting high in my cab and all the way over on the right of the road, so I had better vision, and all of a sudden I seen this other car. It was coming in the other direction, sticking to the right side of the road, only that was the same side the lady was going on to pass me. I yelled, but she didn't hear me, and anyway, it was too late. She swung right in front of my truck, trying to scoot back on her side of the road, but the coupe smacked her on the left side. The sedan sailed clear across the road and over this here hill. The coupe got it plenty too, like you can see."

Spruce stopped, shivering a little as he remembered.

"And then?" Uncle Will prompted.

Spruce shrugged thin shoulders. "Wasn't much I could do. I ran first to the car on the road, the coupe. The guy was screaming. I tried to pull him out, but the motor wedged him against the seat. As I was tugging him, he passed out, so I figured it best not to touch him. Another car came along and I yelled for the driver to bring help, and then I ran down this hill. But the sedan was already burning and I couldn't get close enough to try and lift the body out." He passed the back of his hand over his mouth. "Anyway, chances was she was already dead."

HENRY Shay closed his notebook and stuck his mechanical pencil back into his shirt pocket. "Need me around here any more, Uncle Will?" he asked.

The sheriff wasn't pleased. That question seemed to indicate that his deputy wasn't as devoted to duty as he might be. He said crisply:

"Guess there's nothing much you can do."

Henry cut diagonally across the road to where his jalopy was parked over the shoulder. Slowly he drove north along Route 37, all the way to Fort Hals, then back. When he returned to the scene of the accident, almost the only sign of it left was that the two-toned blue sedan down the slope hadn't yet been removed by wreckers. The police and the gawkers were gone.

He drove on to Rexton, rolling so slowly that there wasn't a car or even a truck which didn't pass him.

Aunt Dina was annoyed when he entered the house. She was a pale, tight-

lipped woman who was generally annoyed about something. This time it was because an auto accident had made both men late for dinner, and because Henry came even later than her husband.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Dina," Henry said.

"I was working on this accident case." Uncle Will, who was piling potatoes beside his pot roast on his plate, looked up with a frown. "Where were you doing this work, Henry?"

"Up and down the highway." He reached for his tomato juice. "Has the dead woman been identified yet?"

"Right after you left. We had the license plate of the burned car and the state police looked up the owner. The owner identified the car, then went to the morgue and identified the dead woman as his wife. He's John Edgecombe—lives over in Fairview. She's Bessie Edgecombe. Seems she was returned home from shopping in Rexton."

"What was her hurry?" Henry said.

"Huh? Oh, you mean passing that truck on a curve? No hurry, I guess. She had plenty of time before supper. And her husband says she was a very careful driver—never took a chance. Well, this time she did."

"Maybe," Henry said.

"Maybe what?" Uncle Will demanded.

"What's eating you, Henry?"

Henry waited until the food in his mouth was chewed. Then he said: "Route 37 is eleven and four-tenth miles between Fort Hals and Rexton. It's a two-lane road all the way, with lots of grades and curves, but it seems to be reasonably safe. I've looked up the record. Before this week, there was one fatal accident on that stretch in two years. In the last seven days, there's been three smash-ups, involving six cars. Five people killed, seven more or less seriously injured, a number shaken up."

"Bad luck always comes in bunches," Aunt Dina commented.

Henry went on: "All three accidents were similar. The first and third occurred at blind curves and the second on the crest of a hill. All three smash-ups were head-on collisions. Each was caused by a car being on the wrong side of the road at a place where an oncoming car couldn't be seen till too late."

"You're describing," Uncle Will said with his mouth full of mashed potatoes, "the way most accidents happen on highways. Nothing more dangerous

than passing a car on a two-lane road."

"But these cars were passing on blind curves or hills," Henry protested.

"That's what causes accidents—stupid drivers."

"Did drivers get more stupid than usual this week? When the law of averages is given a kick in the face, we can call it bad luck or coincidence, but I have a better word. I think it's design."

PLACIDLY Uncle Will continued to eat pot roast. His round face showed only the satisfaction of a hungry man doing something about his appetite.

But Aunt Dina said: "Design? You mean on purpose, like it was planned?"

"Yes," Henry stated flatly.

Uncle Will looked up from his plate. "So that's what you were getting at when you talked about murder back there?" He sighed. "I swear you in as deputy during your vacation because summer visitors make more problems than I can handle alone. You've been working in pretty good, but I guess keeping husbands and wives from throwing things at each other and auto accidents is too dull. What you'd like is an exciting murder."

An angry flush rose to Henry's pink cheeks. "Five murders," he pointed out dryly. "Not counting the injured."

"My gracious!" Aunt Dina exclaimed. "Murders!"

Uncle Will smiled patronizingly. "I never had a college education, Henry, but I know a thing or two. I even know what words like coincidence and design mean. But you need a couple of more words to complete the picture—such as motive and method. Take motive first. Why would anybody want to cause those accidents?"

"Well—" Henry fumbled with his fork. "Maybe a madman."

"Uh-huh," Uncle Will said mockingly. "A crazy fellow running amok and making people kill each other on the highway. But all right, say that's it. We're answering *why*, meaning motive. Now let's ask *how*, meaning method. How did your crazy man persuade those people to go out and kill themselves in their cars?"

"Well—" Henry said again. He felt ridiculous under Aunt Dina's fascinated stare and Uncle Will's round-faced smile. "I never claimed I have all the answers."

"But you go off half-cocked saying it's murder when a little common sense shows it can't be." Uncle Will's face got suddenly grave. "And don't go around talking about murder. Some folks will start to believe you and then they'll ask why the sheriff doesn't do anything about it."

Henry ate the rest of the meal in silence.

When it was finished, he put on his leather jacket and said that he was going over to the Fort Hals hospital.

"Archer may have recovered consciousness and we ought to get down his statement."

"No hurry that I can see," Uncle Will said, settling himself in his favorite chair with a newspaper. "But go ahead if you have nothing else to do."

The hospital was a small, informal place built on a single floor. Mrs. Sodman, the big-boned, hearty head nurse, was in the lobby with a young woman who held a handkerchief to reddened eyes.

"Hi, Henry," Mrs. Sodman sang out as he came through the door. Then she said to the other woman: "I assure you that that's all there was in the wallet when we undressed your husband. Unless you suspect me or one of the nurses."

"No, no!" the younger woman said. "But I'm sure that he had much more than six dollars in his wallet. A great deal more."

Mrs. Sodman's voice became crisp. "This young man is the deputy sheriff, Mrs. Archer. If you wish to make a complaint against me or the hospital—"

"Oh, no!" The woman sent a scared glance at Henry. "I don't really care about the money. How can I when my poor husband has been so terribly injured?" She brought a moist handkerchief up to her eyes.

"Are you Mrs. George Archer?" Henry asked her.

She nodded and broke into audible sobs.

"There, there," the head nurse comforted her. "He'll be all right. You'll be able to see him in only a few minutes, as soon as Dr. Mitchum comes out." She caught the inquiry in Henry's eyes. "You too, Henry. I suppose, if you'll promise not to ask too many questions."

"How's Farley?"

"Chipper enough to try to make love

to all the younger nurses," Mrs. Sodman told him. "You can go right in his room if you want to."

QUICKLY Henry Shay walked down the long corridor to the last room on the left. The door was open. Frederick Farley was sitting up in bed, smoking a cigarette and reading a detective novel. He was a big, handsome man, only a few years older than Henry.

Farley had been injured in the second accident of the week. He'd been lucky to get out of it with only a couple of cracked ribs, because the man with whom he had been driving, Martin Thomson, had been killed instantly.

"How are the ribs?" Henry asked, sitting down on the bedside chair.

"I got a worse banging up in my football days." He put down his book and offered Henry a cigarette. "I hear there was another smack-up today on Route Thirty-Seven. Something should be done about that road."

"It's safe enough," Henry said. "It's the drivers that are unsafe."

"I guess that's so. Can't understand why Marty Thomson took a crazy chance like that."

Henry crossed his legs. "I've got your statement down in writing, but tell me about it again. Maybe you left something out."

"Not enough happened to leave out," Farley said. "I mean it was simple enough. Thomson and I were driving north in his car. Doing fifty or sixty, I suppose, though I wasn't paying attention. We were talking. Suddenly I looked around and saw that we were passing a truck. That was okay, of course, but then I saw that we were near the crest of a hill and shooting up the left side. Now I'm not a nervous driver, but Thomson had no way of seeing if a car was coming up the other side of the hill. And sure enough, that's just what did happen. We smacked on top of that hill—about a second after Thomson and that other driver saw each other. That's all I can tell you. I bumped my head on the windshield and was knocked out cold."

Henry said: "What kind of a driver was Thomson?"

"Good. Not the kind who'd take foolish chances."

"Was he in a hurry?"

"Not a bit. We both had time."

"Yet he passed a truck just below the crest of a hill."

Farley brooded at his knees raised under the sheet. "And killed himself and a woman in that other car and injured two other people."

Henry thanked him and went out. On the way up the corridor he passed a door on which the card said "George Archer." Voices came through the panel. He opened it a crack and saw that the head nurse and Mrs. Archer were in the room. He entered.

George Archer lay very still in bed, his eyes closed. He looked considerably older than his wife. His swarthy, fleshy face was decorated with a hairline mustache.

Henry stepped to the side of the bed. "Mrs. Archer, I'm Deputy Sheriff Shay. I'd like to ask you a question or two."

"Make it brief," Mrs. Sodman whispered.

Archer opened his eyes. They were clouded with drugs he had been given to ease his pain.

"I—I was driving along," he said thickly. "Suddenly I saw a car on the wrong side, coming toward me. I tried to avoid it. Couldn't." His voice faded.

Henry ran his tongue over his lips. The answer had come before he'd had a chance to ask the question. There was nothing else. The woman who might have been able to tell him something was the woman who had passed Al Spruce's dump truck, and she was dead.

Archer's left hand plucked at the cover. "That other car—was it insured? Will my wife collect money?"

Henry started to tell him that he didn't know yet when Mrs. Archer's voice exploded.

"George, your ring! Where is it?"

ARCHER lifted his left hand, looked dully at the pinky. "I—I guess the nurse took it off."

"I undressed you," Mrs. Sodman said. "I certainly didn't remove a ring from your finger."

"But it's gone!" Mrs. Archer cried. "It's been stolen! It was a sapphire, worth a thousand dollars."

"Fourteen hundred," Archer muttered weakly, then seemed to lose interest.

Mrs. Sodman said: "Henry, I hope nobody in the hospital is suspected of theft? It's ridiculous, of course."

"His money and his ring!" Mrs.

Archer said bitterly. "He cashed a big check only yesterday at the bank. For three hundred dollars."

Henry leaned over the bed, "Mr. Archer, did you have that cash on you during the accident?"

"Cash?" Archer roused himself. "Yes. Almost three hundred dollars. Never mind the money and the ring! Will my wife get insurance money if I die?"

"You're certainly not going to die," Mrs. Sodman told him. She straightened up and glowered at Henry and Archer. "You're both exciting him. Please leave."

Henry went out, followed by Mrs. Archer and then Mrs. Sodman.

In the corridor, Mrs. Archer said distractedly: "All I care about is for George to get well. But all the same, the money and the ring—"

"I hope you don't accuse anybody in this hospital," Mrs. Sodman said stiffly.

"No, no!" Mrs. Archer said. "But all the same—"

Henry got away from them. He looked up Dr. Roberts, the interne who had taken Archer to the hospital. Dr. Roberts hadn't noticed a ring on Archer's left pinky. Maybe there had been one, maybe not; he'd been more concerned in saving a man's life than in his jewelry.

It was after ten o'clock when Henry returned to his jalopy parked in front of the hospital. For a while he sat behind the wheel and looked down Market Street, which was what Route 37 was called where it passed through Fort Hals. Then he drove through the town and a mile beyond it turned off on a dirt and tar road.

Crude letters on a slab of wood nailed on a tree read: A. SPRUCE, TRUCKING.

Henry swung his jalopy off the road onto a hard dirt area which was the front yard of a tiny gray-shingled house. The door opened into the glare of his headlights.

"Who's that?" Spruce demanded.

Henry cut his headlights and got out and walked up to the house. Light from the open doorway flowed over Al Spruce. He had shaved since the accident this afternoon, but his face retained that pinched, hungry look.

"Good-evening, Mr. Spruce," Henry said politely.

Spruce peered. "What's the matter, sonny—can't you read my statement you wrote down this afternoon?"

"It's something else," Henry said. "Three hundred dollars and a valuable ring were stolen from George Archer."

Spruce showed no reaction to that. He merely said: "So?"

"I wonder if you knew anything about it?"

Spruce leaned against the door jamb and impassively surveyed Henry. "If you wasn't just a kid who's making like he's a deputy sheriff, I'd smack you. I guess you just don't know better than accusing respectable citizens without evidence."

"I'm not accusing you," Henry retorted. "I only asked you if you know who could have taken the ring and the money."

"Sure, I know." Spruce's thin mouth smiled vaguely. "It could've been me. It could've been one of the people in the cars who stopped on the road while I was trying to pull that woman out of the burning car. It could've been you or the sheriff or the state cops. It could've been the ambulance doctor or the driver or anybody in the hospital. So what?"

HENRY felt ridiculous. Somehow he had worked this all wrong, and what was worse, he didn't know how else to work it. He said angrily: "But which one of them would have combined it with murder?"

"Murder, is it?" Spruce frowned. "Who's been knocked off?"

"Nobody exactly. That is—" Henry hated himself for fumbling before this man. He said: "So you can't help me out?"

"Sonny, you're the one who's getting paid to play deputy sheriff, not me."

Al Spruce stepped back. The door slammed.

In the darkness, Henry felt himself flush. What he resented most of all was being called "sonny."

When he returned home, the house was in darkness. Uncle Will and Dina were already asleep.

He went upstairs and tapped lightly on the door of their room. After a while Uncle Will came out to the hall in his long old-fashioned nightgown. Henry told him about the missing money and ring.

"Bad," Uncle Will mused, scratching his jowls. "We can write an accident off the books. But when there's some-

thing stolen on top of it, it's a headache for us."

"I went to see the truck driver, Al Spruce," Henry said. "He laughed at me. He had the opportunity, but he pointed out that so did a lot of others."

In the dim hall light Uncle Will's face looked haggard. "You should've let me handle this, Henry. It's a ticklish problem. You can't go around accusing people."

"I didn't accuse him."

"And I hope," Uncle Will went on, "you haven't been making any wild public statements about murder?"

"No," Henry said. Then he remembered that he'd said something about murder a while ago, but he hadn't been understood.

"That's good. I guess you have to expect young fellas to have brainstorm. Go around talking about murders and people will be wondering why the sheriff doesn't do anything about them. And Election Day only a few months off."

"All right," Henry said bitterly, "so George Archer only dreamed he had three hundred dollars and a valuable ring."

Uncle Will said patiently: "That's something else altogether. You let me handle it. Good night."

Henry went into his room. Just before he fell asleep, he decided to quit his job in the morning. He was going to college to study to be an engineer, not a policeman. The devil with it. He'd do better waiting on tables during his vacations.

In the morning, Henry Shay had completely forgotten his decision to quit. His mind was occupied with a job to be done. When he went downstairs, he found that Uncle Will had already left. Hurriedly he ate the breakfast Aunt Dina served him and drove off.

He stopped off at the hospital and went directly to Frederick Farley's room. Farley was reading a different detective novel, from a pile besides his bed.

"Just one question," Henry said. "Did you find anything of yours missing after the accident?"

"Nothing but my wallet," Farley replied indifferently.

Henry sat forward in his chair. "And you didn't make a complaint?"

"Aw, it was only a fifty-cent wallet, and I didn't have a thing of value in it except seven dollars. I didn't know it was gone till a few days later. Somebody pinched it during the excitement of the accident, or maybe it just fell out of my pocket. I figured it wasn't worth going through a lot of police red tape."

Henry stood up. "Thanks, Mr. Farley," he said.

He drove to the county building in Rexton. Uncle Will was in his office. Henry told him about Farley's missing wallet.

"Another one," Uncle Will said glumly.

"That makes two who were robbed right after an accident—Archer and Farley."

UNCLE Will pushed out his lower lip. "More than two. There was Amy Noble, who was killed in the first accident. Her mother claims her wristwatch and necklace are missing. Then there's Carl Wilcox, who had his collarbone broken in the same accident. He says he had forty-seven dollars before the accident and only four dollars after."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Maybe," Uncle Will said sourly, "I ought to remind you that I'm the sheriff and you're only working the summer months. I don't have to give you reports."

Henry turned his face away to hide the angry flush. Then he asked: "Did others involved in the accidents miss things?"

"Aren't these four enough?"

"No," Henry said slowly. "There were others who were dead or could be robbed. Or so badly injured that they didn't know at the time that they were being robbed."

Uncle Will looked rather sad. "There's another brainstorm. Is the county full of crooks? Or does somebody have inside dope on who's going to be in an accident and follow them so he can rob them when it happens?"

"I mean," Henry said, "that the murders and the robberies are part of a single scheme."

"My gosh, Henry! Now you're going stark crazy!"

Henry said stubbornly: "Listen, Uncle Will. Last fall at college three students were murdered over a period of four

weeks. Two men and a woman. Each one was waylaid at night on the campus and strangled. The killer was caught—a porter working in town. He confessed that he killed them to rob them. Out of the three murders he got thirty-six dollars in cash and watches and jewelry worth perhaps a couple of hundred dollars more."

"Uncle Will didn't say anything.

"A lot more than that was stolen from the victims of the accidents," Henry went on. "We know of only four who lost something. There are others who are dead and can't tell us, and their families don't know just what they had on them at the time of the accident."

Uncle Will sighed. "When you get brainstorm, you sure get beauties. Can all the loot amount to more than a few thousand dollars tops?"

"I told you about a man who murdered three times for a lot less. We're not dealing with a rational person. A rational person wouldn't murder for any amount of money."

"All right, let's say I agree. How does the thief happen to be on the spot whenever there's an accident?"

"There are some people who always are. Say the ambulance driver or the ambulance interne."

Uncle Will nodded tiredly. "It's an idea I had myself. Only you left some other suspects out. Like the sheriff."

"You're making a joke out of it," Henry protested.

"I'm dead serious. We reveal that all these people have been robbed in recent accidents, and folks will say: Who had a better chance than the sheriff or his deputy?" He wagged a finger at his nephew. "Last night I said to let me handle this."

"And if it was murder?" Henry persisted. "If there'll be more murders made to look like accidents?"

"Why don't you ask, if the moon was made of green cheese why don't we cut ourselves a piece for lunch? It makes as much sense. How do you talk people into driving so that they'll kill themselves?"

"I don't know," Henry muttered.

"You don't know because there is no way." Uncle Will pushed a slip of paper across his desk. "Here's a complaint about a Peeping Tom in Wood Hollow. If you find the man just give him a good talking to—the first time."

HENRY shoved the address into his leather jacket and left. Wood Hollow was a few miles south of Fort Hals, and you went to it by way of Route 37. His old car had plenty of pep, though going fifty in it felt like a hundred in almost any other car. He pushed up the speedometer another five miles. Speed was relief to his knotted nerves, eased somewhat the impotent anger roused by his uncle's mocking attitude. The wind rushing in through the open windows felt good on his face.

Ahead a twelve-wheel trailer truck lumbered up a grade. Henry slowed down, then nosed out to see if he could pass. No chance. The top of the hill was less than a hundred feet away, and there was no way of telling if a car was coming up the other side.

He was slipping back to the right lane when an arm extended from the truck cab and waved him on. Automatically Henry swung back to the left lane. The crest of the hill was very near, but that didn't worry him. You could almost always depend on a truck driver to be cooperative on the road. Farther up the grade and sitting much higher in his cab, he could see that no car was coming up the other side.

Henry stepped on the gas, shooting past that long length of trailer truck. He passed it just before the top of the grade. He was almost even with the cab. He raised his right hand to wave thanks to the truck driver—and suddenly terror gripped his stomach.

He knew now. In his mind he could see another car speeding up the other side of the grade, and they'd meet head-on on the same lane.

Frantically he came down on his brakes. His car skidded toward the side of the truck, recovered, fell back. The huge double wheels of the truck lumbered by, and the jalopy fell back into the right lane.

He could see now that there was no other car coming from the opposite direction. The truck driver had seen that too, of course, only earlier, and had signaled for him to pass. But suppose he had signaled as another speeding car was approaching?

There was sweat on Henry's face. He pulled his car over on the grass, and waited for his stomach to settle, his nerves to ease.

After a while he drove on. He passed Wood Hollow without stopping. He turned at Fort Hals and drove back south on Route 37. At Rexton he turned again and drove north. He kept this up for several hours.

He began to feel foolish, futile. This wasn't the way to do it. But then, what was?

It was close to noon when he saw the dump truck ahead. That was about a mile from the grade followed by the sharp curve where yesterday Bessie Edgcombe had been killed and George Archer injured.

He could have passed the truck then, but he didn't. He dawdled, until half-way up the grade. Then he sped up to within a few feet of the tail-light of the truck.

Exhaust smoke poured out of the dump truck as it wheezed and rattled up the grade, doing hardly more than five miles an hour. Henry nosed out for a look at the blind curve ahead, eased back. An arm came out from the dump truck seat, signaling to him that the way was clear around the curve.

Henry shot out to the left lane. He knew exactly what he was doing. There was a flat, grassy stretch on the other side of the road, and he headed diagonally for it. He was bouncing over the shoulder when a snappy convertible came tearing around that blind curve. It sped between the jalopy and the truck and continued without loss of speed.

The jalopy had stopped. Henry sagged a little behind the wheel, pale and shaken, thinking that, if he hadn't known, his car and the convertible would now be tangled wrecks.

He turned his head, and across the road his eyes met Al Spruce's eyes blazing in a pinched face.

"Murderer!"

THE word burst out of Henry's throat. Al Spruce's face vanished. The dump truck was moving past, gathering speed as it reached the down-grade.

Henry backed his car onto the road, gave chase. It wasn't even a race, but he didn't dare try to pull even with the truck. Spruce would deliberately smash it into him.

He stopped and jumped out of his car with his gun in hand. He shot three

times at the rear wheels of the dump truck. He was a rotten shot; every bullet missed. But the shots had their effect on Al Spruce. The dump truck came to a shuddering halt.

"Don't shoot!" Al Spruce yelled "Don't shoot!"

With the gun held tight against his side, Henry strode forward.

* * * * *

They found the loot under a floor-board in Al Spruce's house.

"There's our case," State Trooper Robinson said. "Frederick Farley remembers that it was a dump truck Thomson was passing just before the collision. Others who were only injured will remember that too, and I'm thinking that some of them will identify Spruce as the first to reach them."

Uncle Will was kneeling beside the loot. "Rings, watches, bracelets and so on. He didn't have to hide the cash. Worth maybe three or four thousand dollars. My gosh, Spruce was stark mad!"

"All murderers are mad," Henry said. "The ones who do it for money generally do it for ridiculous sums. Like the porter I told you about who killed three students at college last fall. I think that murder itself is the main thing, and robbery is just an excuse for it."

Uncle Will straightened up. "Why did he pick on you, Henry? He could see you didn't have a swell car. Likely you wouldn't have anything of value on you."

"He recognized my car through the mirror. Last night I blurted out to him that I suspected the accidents were murder. Then today, when I realized how they'd been managed, I knew it had to be Spruce whose dump truck Mrs. Edgcombe had been passing. Spruce saw me coming up behind him and he saw a convertible coming on the other side of the blind curve, and he figured it was a chance to get rid of me. So he signaled me to pass him."

Trooper Robinson shivered a little. "I'd say you're one lucky boy, Henry."

"Lucky?" Uncle Will resented the word. "Brains, not luck. We were just going through the motions of being policemen. Henry was really working at it."

Henry Shay turned his head aside so that they wouldn't notice the flush of pleasure on his pink cheeks.

By STEWART STERLING



Koski twisted, grabbed
a fistful of apron, and
yanked viciously

ALIBI BABY

*A water-soaked derby hat
leads Police Lieutenant Koski
to a case of double murder!*

THE patrol-boat *Vigilant* furrowed the oily blackness of the Sound like a plow turning soft mud. The probing finger of her searchlight groped past the rusty hulk of an anchored tanker, found the red nun buoy, slanting sharply in the ebb.

In the pilot house the big sergeant

spun the spokes to circle the channel marker. "You'll be havin' your name on the promotion roster, sure, Steve." In the dim glow flooding up from the binnacle bowl, his fleshy Celtic face had the appearance of an aggrieved Kewpie. "The powers that be can do no less than up you to a Captain's berth after the

neat way you pin a lily on that dock rat's chest."

"Ah, Sarge, I wouldn't bust up our partnership like so." Steve Koski's lean, muscular figure relaxed against the port bulkhead. The reflection of the running light off the foredeck ruddied his long, narrow features, varnishing the prominent cheekbones with a weathered-oak effect which made him appear more like a stoical cigar-store Indian than the Harbor Squad's most feared plainclothes lieutenant. "What'd a captain's badge get me? Swivel-chair spread. Executives' pot. Uh-uh, I'll stick to a deck instead of a desk, long's they'll let me. Our trouble is, cops get no more chance than undertakers. Usually we don't get called in until the corpse is cold. How often do we save anybody?"

Mulcahey protested. "Show me any boat in the Marine Division with a better record of rescues than the *Vigilant*, now!"

"I wasn't referring to cock-eyed bargehands we drag out of the drink, or the desperate dames we fish out of the East River." Koski held the white funnel of light on a floating object, about the size of a man's head bobbing in a black eddy some thirty feet off the buoy. "Speaking of rescues, let's peek at that."

"Twill likely be a half melon off a garbage scow. Or a rare, vintage derby blown off the night boat." Mulcahey throttled the grumbling exhaust down to a hollow mutter.

The police boat lost way. The *hrrrush* of the bow wave fell to a whisper. Koski leaned out over the gunwale, dipped his boathook.

"I'll score you fifty percent, Sarge. It is a hat. But no derby." Koski turned the dripping headgear over in his knotty fingers beneath the glare of the searchlight beam.

IT was a wool yachting cap of navy blue. Its patent-leather visor was cracked and split, its gold braid torn and tarnished. Above the visor and between the braided anchors was pinned a white celluloid button with bold black lettering: BATHING BEAUTY INSPECTOR'S LICENSE.

Around the button's rim, in smaller type: Official Navel Inspector O! O! O!

Mulcahey grinned through the pilot house window. "Dost deem it worthy of listing in the log?"

Koski didn't answer. He touched a dark spot about the size of a cookie on the cloth top. Under the bright white light his finger tip looked as if it had been smeared with ketchup.

Mulcahey let the motor idle, came back to the cockpit. "Wouldst crave to have us head back for Pier One so we can turn this in to the lab boys?" he asked. "They could put it under their microscopes, analyze it in their test tubes and so on and forth. Eventually comin' up with the startling information that the owner thereof had a severe nosebleed or maybe cut his toe on some barnacles."

"Oh, sure!" Koski answered sarcastically. "Top of a cap's just the thing to use for stanching a nosebleed!" He turned the cap over, peered at the inside. Stuck to the underside of the bloodstain were two white hairs.

"That," Mulcahey said, "don't look so good, now. I wouldn't kid about that!"

"Could be the owner lent the cap to his St. Bernard, or course!" Carefully the lieutenant pulled open the worn leather sweatband. Stuck against the stiff-wired fabric frame was a water-soaked and sweat-stained business card, which read:

CITY ISLAND DELICATESSEN

3144 City Island Avenue

Sandwiches & Picnic Lunches A Specialty
Stock Your Galley—Discount To Boat Trade

"Top of the cap is dry," Mulcahey pointed out. "With that air caught underneath it and the tide runnin' fast, it might have been kept from sinkin'—all the way from the Island."

"Yair. Would mean it hasn't been in the water more'n an hour. Figuring the current at two point five knots. Make it around nine p.m. it started to drift down here." Koski examined the other side of the card. In purplish indelible ink were scrawled names:

Hazel T.END 6-2293
BubblesCAT 5-5847
MollyoHAR 4-9096
Ansy Pansy18 Magaw Pl.

Mulcahey whistled. "That last one sounds like a hot biscuit. Perchance this Lothario was fidoodling around with too many frails. Mayhap one of 'em found she was being crossed up and belted Casanova over the dome."

"Boats," Koski said irritably.

"Huh?"

"Not names of dames, Sarge. Names

of boats. With the phones of owners. Gents who want to sell their craft. Plenty dough, every spring."

"Oh, yeah." Mulcahey nodded. "Lots of guys offering their boats as a bargain before they put the hulls in the water."

"That *Ansy Pansy*. Sailboat, isn't she? Comet class champ couple years ago, if I remember."

"They's quite a few of them one designs haul out at the Trident Yacht Club, Skipper."

Koski took cap and card into the pilot house, deposited them carefully on the glass chart case.

"Give with that gas, Irish," he said.

Mulcahey jammed the reverse lever ahead, revved the two hundred horses to a thundering roar. The *Vigilant's* nose lifted. Her tail squatted. White wings of spray planed out from the quarters. The square green flag whipped taut in the rush of air as the blunt-bowed thirty-two footer overtook a long row of black dominoes silhouetted against the ghostly green of Stepping Stones light.

When the pilot house windows were abeam of the tug hauling the string of barges, Koski asked:

"What kind of guy'd be likely to have the phone numbers of four different boat owners, Irish?"

"One these brokers?"

"Not wearing a cap like that. No. Not around the Trident."

"Ship chandler, now? Marine supply man? Sometimes they sell—"

"Those boys keep their dope in office file, not in their hats."

Mulcahey gave up.

Koski stuffed a bulldog briar, silently. Then:

"How about some yacht club employee?"

"Yuh. Sure. That could be it. Steward, like?"

"Trident's not that tony. When the season's under way, they might go so far as to hire a cook, but their flag doesn't go up until Decoration Day. However, even in April, they have a watchman."

"Old geezer, yuh. I seen him." The sergeant sighted along his samson post, lining it up with the four vertical blue lights on the Trident's clubhouse mast. Then he gazed at Koski with something approaching awe. "That would fit in with those white hairs!"

KOSKI squinted at the sergeant before answering.

"Name's Versena. Pete Versena, something like that. Always goes around needing a haircut and a shave. They call him Poodle Pete along the Island."

"That lid, with the snappy crack gimmick in place of the regular club button," Mulcahey agreed, "Yuh, that would be just his speed, now." He shot another sidelong glance at his superior and shipmate. "If ever I am tempted to dally with a career of crime, I will steer me a course one hundred eighty degrees away from you, so help me!"

"Don't go jumping off the deep end yet." Koski shaded his eyes to squint toward the club float, past the moored sloops, cabin cruisers, outboards and strings of rental rowboats. "Chances are Poodle Pete's just looked too long on the wine while it was red and is sleeping it off on a bridge-deck somewhere."

But when the *Vigilant* nudged the Trident's float, there was so sign of the elderly watchman, nor any answer to Koski's hail.

Mulcahey was troubled, "If he's up and about, 'tis queer he's not here. You could not say we arrive on tiptoe."

Koski half-hitched the stern line over a float cleat, used his hand lantern. On the opposite end of the float, staining the wet canvas binding of the rub rail, he found more blobs of dark and ominous red.

"We can eliminate the barnacles, Irish. Just to play it safe, take a punch at that short-wave. Tell the *Sentinel* to hustle in from the Harlem." He moved up the gangway into the gloom of the yacht yard. "And dust off those grappling irons."

The lights on the signal mast washed the clubhouse with a ghostly blue and gave a sepulchral tinge to the canvas-shrouded hulls not yet uncovered for spring refitting. The only noise Koski heard was the crunch of his heels on the gravel.

Up the yard, beyond a score of hooded motor boats and high-masted sloops, an amber glow warmed the portholes of a small cabin cruiser. The lieutenant frowned at it, then turned toward the back porch of the clubhouse.

"Hi, Pete." Silence. "Hey—Poo-o-odle." Nothing answered but the slap of the tide against pilings.

He tried the back door. It was unlocked. The kitchen was dark. Grim lines at the corners of Koski's mouth hardened. The old watchman never would have left the premises, without first locking up.

Koski took his time in going through the yard, peering beneath squat-sterned catboats, sharp-nosed speed boats. No Pete. Nobody.

Brass lettering on the transom of the lighted cruiser proclaimed *C-Urchin*, New York. She was a raised decker with steering shelter glassed in and protected aft by new khaki cockpit curtains. Her hull was freshly painted, a smart emerald bootstripe setting off the gloss white of the topsides. Somebody knew how to look after a sea-going lady, he decided.

A home-made ladder of paint-bespeckled 2x4s stood against her, amidships, surrounded by sawhorses, paint cans, an upturned dinghy. Its upper end reached to one of the cockpit curtains which had been left unfastened, flopping loosely in the night breeze.

"Ahoy, on the *Urchin*," Koski hailed. He knuckled the hull loudly.

There were hasty steps. A white face appeared timidly in the gap beside the loose curtain—a girl, dark hair bound in a yellow bandana, dark eyes wide with fear.

"What is it?" Her voice was tremulous.

"Harbor Police," Koski said.

"Oh!" She gasped, clutched at a stanchion. "What's wrong, officer?"

"Take it easy," Koski wondered whether it had been his arrival that so frightened her. "Just looking for the club watchman. Seen him around the yard tonight?"

"Pete?" she managed. "No. Not since supper. Why do you want him?"

Koski half turned, as if to go. "You alone on the boat, miss?"

"No." She seemed relieved at his indication of departure. "Ken's here—my husband. I'm Marya Caton. If I see Pete, I'll tell him you want to see him." She started to withdraw.

He moved back to the ladder. "Ask Mr. Caton if he's seen Pete."

"Why—Ken's not here now." She was alarmed by Koski's fresh show of interest. "When I said he was here, I didn't mean he's on board right now."

"When you expect him back?"

"Most any minute. He just went out—to see if he could find some—some stuff to fix our sink drain."

Koski put a foot on the first rung.

She retreated to the shadowy interior of the cockpit.

"That's what scared me," she went on hurriedly, "your saying you're from the police. I thought something'd happened to him."

Koski climbed up. "If he's coming right back, I might wait for him, Mrs. Caton."

HE paused at the top of the ladder, holding onto the new canvas where a jagged piece had been torn out of one corner.

"I'll stay here in the cockpit," he suggested.

"No, no," she apologized nervously. "I guess you can come below. It's only—Ken's always warning me about letting anybody come aboard when he's not here."

"Wise gent." Koski pushed the canvas aside, got a leg over the coaming. She retreated down the companionway.

With the light from the cabin on her, Koski could see how pretty she was. She was not more than twenty-five, with delicate oval features made to seem a bit more rugged by a warm, winter tan. The smallness of her hands was emphasized by her quick, fluttering bird-like movements.

One of the hands moved to her throat apprehensively.

"Has Pete done anything to get him into trouble?"

"Not that I know of." Koski let her worry about it.

The cabin was like the girl—small, attractive, neat as a pin. Brasswork gleaming, brightwork glistening with varnish, bright cretonne at the ports, cozy cushions on the bunks, framed photos on the forward bulkhead. One, of a youth in a corporal's uniform.

"Your husband?" he pointed.

"That's Ken. Yes." Fear stayed in her eyes, her voice. "We married just before the war. We haven't been together much. He's only been back a year. We haven't been able to find a place to live." Under Koski's gaze, she shivered suddenly, though the shipmate range should have kept the April chill out of the cruiser. "So Ken bought the *Urchin* with a G.I. loan. We meant to

charter her for fishing, but—" her voice faltered.

"Plans change?" Brittle glass crunched beneath his shoes as Koski crossed to the companionway. He looked down. One of the splintered shards had a curved edge like a watch crystal, only larger.

His right hand, hidden from the girl, felt along the cabin roof. In a box set into the rounded roof, just forward of the steering wheel, was a four-inch compass hung in gimbals. The mahogany top of the box had been smashed, the thick glass lens broken. Other fragments were on the deck, in the groove of the hatch slide.

"Prices have gone up so." She'd had time to figure out her answer. "We thought we could charge twenty-five dollars for taking out a party of four. With meals, that is. But, things the way they are, we'd have to ask forty. There won't be so many who'll pay that."

He nodded sympathetically, wondering why a boat owner whose craft was otherwise so shipshape—or a boatkeeper whose galley pans were so spic and span—would leave a broken compass around like that.

"That's the kind of difficulty the police aren't much help on, Mrs. Caton. But if there's anything else bothering you?"

"Oh, no," she cried, biting her lip. "There's nothing. I—I just get so lonely—sometimes—with Ken—away." She turned aside so he wouldn't notice the tears in her eyes.

A low whistle shrilled close by; high note, low note, repeated.

She froze, rigid as a child playing still-pond-no-more-moving.

Koski said: "That him?"

Marya nodded.

"Tell him to come on in." Koski didn't appear to notice her tension.

She stumbled up the companionway. "Ken!" she called, almost hysterically. "It's all right, Ken. Come on up."

Koski was right behind her. He caught her before she got to the head of the ladder, pushed her aside, looked out.

He didn't see anyone. Or hear anyone. The whistle wasn't repeated.

When he got to the ground, she leaned out of the cockpit above him, shouting: "Ken! Ken!"

Koski glanced up. "Never mind," he said. "You've warned him enough."

She shook her head violently, terrified. "Not that it'll make any difference," he told her. "We'll get hold of him. Don't fret about that."

Mulcahey was using the probe pole in the soft mud alongside the float when Koski got back.

"What was the commotion, Steve? Did I not hear some babe crying aloud in the night?"

"Dame on the *C-Urchin*, Yair. When the *Sentinel* pulls in, tell 'em to use care with those hooks. We don't want to mark up—whatever's down there. No more'n it's been marked up."

"'Twill be the watchman, then?"

"He's not around, anyway, Sarge. And I wanted to ask this dame's husband about that. But *he's* not around, either. When the boys get to dragging, you go up and keep a peeper on that cruiser. Something smells fishier'n a week-old halibut."

Koski strode away. Everything was quiet on the Caton boat when he went past and out to City Island Avenue.

AT the delicatessen whose card had been in the cap, he asked about the Catons. The proprietor was obliging, but wary. He was sorry, but he couldn't remember seeing Marya or her husband for some time. If the matter was urgent—

Koski said it was urgent, all right.

The delicatessen man frowned. Had the lieutenant asked at the Anchor? The Catons frequently dropped in at the Anchor.

"Thanks," said Koski. "I'll do the same."

The bar-and-grill with the pink neon anchor over its door was practically opposite the Trident Yacht Club. Through grimy windows, Koski could see a long bar, a kaleidoscopic juke box, half a dozen tables covered with red-checkered cloth. A dozen waterfront characters were draped over the bar. At one table sat a solitary woman.

The blare and beat of Harry James greeted him as he swung open the door:

Bongo, Bongo, Bongo
I don' wanna leave the Congo

The stench of stale beer, rank tobacco, sour sweat and strong disinfectant had the force of a blow. The men at the bar turned to eye the newcomer. None of them looked like the photograph on the *C-Urchin's* bulkhead.

Only the woman greeted Koski. She was a scrawny specimen of indeterminate age, with red-rimmed eyes and a shiny beacon of a nose.

"Ah-ha," she hiccupped loudly. "Me old chum! Me bucko mate and buddy! Pull up one of m'knees an' siddown, pal."

Koski smiled, striding toward the bar. "How they going, old-timer?"

"Down." She lifted an empty whisky glass. "When I c'n get 'em." She hiccupped again, drooped over the table.

"Rum," Koski murmured to the bartender, a blond wide-shouldered youth with sunbleached hair like new rope ends and a homely genial face. "Demerara, if you have it."

The barkeeper grinned cheerfully. "We used to carry that stuff, but our customers couldn't. How's Jamaica?"

"Jake."

The man behind the bar slopped three fingers of the molasses-brown liquor into a glass. "Something with it?"

"Little information." Koski held out a half-dollar. Under it, in the hollow of his palm, the gold badge with *Marine Division* in blue enamel.

The bartender raised one eyebrow. "Don't know's I can furnish that, either. What's it?"

"Seen Poodle Pete tonight?"

"Nah. Hardly ever do. He don't patronize high-grade joints like ours." Candid gray eyes smiled along with the wide, homely mouth. "Pete belts that buck-a-bottle sherry around, for his. What you want him for?"

"Seems as if the old guy might have got himself hurt." "Just checking around to find out." He took the rum straight. "Ken Caton been in here tonight? Or Mrs. Caton?"

Suspicion clouded the gray eyes instantly. "Neither hair nor hide, of 'em."

"Mmm." Koski shoved the glass across the bar. "Ask your regulars if they've run across him this evening."

The bartender hesitated, scowling. Then he shrugged.

"Any you boys seen Ken lately?" he asked.

"Not me." "Not since last night, Rikky." "That creep? Uh-uh." The bunch at the bar were curious but unconcerned.

The woman at the table spoke up, thickly. "I seen him. At the Chandler's. He was buyin' a piece of pipe."

"Ah, shut up, Lize." Rikky made a

pushing-away gesture with his palm. "You were prob'ly seeing double."

One of the drinkers, standing close to Koski, bobbed his head sideways toward the woman at the table.

He said: "Easy Lizzie can point you out pink ellyfants, if you want 'em." He laughed uproariously.

"Easy" Liz swung around, making her chair creak. "Yah! you crumb bums! I know Ken Caton all right. Know all 'bout him." She hiccupped, got heavily to her feet.

Rikky swaggered around the bar. "That'll be all from you, now, Liz. You're schwocked! Shuddup!"

Unsteadily, she waved him away. "Got a ri' t'say—what I please. Know all 'bout Ken—rotten way he treatsh—treats—sweet li'l wife 'f hish—rotten, shtinkin' temper 'f his—"

Rikky grabbed her, pushed her toward the door.

Koski moved swiftly, caught the barkeep's arm just as Easy Liz was bellowing: "You was shayin' shame thing yourself, tonight, Rikky Lundgren. Y'know you said jus' them very words to Poodle!"

Koski said: "Keep your hair on, brother. Let's hear what she has to say."

"Ah! This old frowz don't know what she's talking about. She's plastered right up to the ceiling!" Rikky glared. "Sign there over the bar says we don't serve intoxicated people. One side, mister." He shoved Easy Liz to the door. The men at the bar circled them.

Koski swung the bartender around. "Leave her alone."

Rikky spat in his eyes.

IN the second it took Koski to blink his back vision Rikky reached the bar, snatched a half-empty whisky bottle, swung it behind him, smashed it on the mahogany back bar. He held the jagged remainder out before him, retreating behind the bar.

Koski did a one-hand, up and over. His feet caught Rikky in the chest, drove him against a pyramid of glassware which crashed down. Rikky slashed the bottle at Koski's abdomen before the lieutenant got his feet under him. Koski twisted, grabbed a fistful of apron high up, yanked viciously and butted his head at the bartender's chin.

A knife edge of the bottle gashed the lieutenant's hip like a red-hot wire. But

with the impact of Koski's forehead, Rikky's chin snapped back, struck a shelf. A mountain of bottles fell on him, cutting his face, drenching him with mint liqueur, cherry brandy, rock and rye.

Koski let go of the apron, wound his fingers in Rikky's tow hair. He banged the blond head against the back bar hard enough to bring down more bottles, kept banging until a handful of hair came loose in his fingers and Rikky sagged limply to the floor.

Koski wiped his face on a bar towel, turned to the men gawking, wide-eyed, on the opposite side of the bar.

"That's it," he mumbled. "Show's over. Close up now. Don't crowd, going out."

The men filed out, swearing under their breaths. Easy Liz wasn't among them; she'd departed as soon as the fight began, Koski guessed. He couldn't see her outside on the street, either.

He locked the front door, switched out the sidewalk neon, examined his wound. The bottle had slashed open a foot of his pants leg but only gouged an inch-long tear in the sensitive part of his thigh.

It bled a lot. He doused some of the Jamaica on it, felt the sharp bite of the alcohol. He went to the rear of the joint. Adjoining doors were marked *Painters*, *Setters*.

He tried the first. It was locked.

In the other he found hot water and a roller towel. He used his knife on the towel, made a passable bandage. When he went out, Rikky was on his knees behind the bar, moaning and holding the top of his head in both hands.

"Plenty more where that came from, Tough Stuff." Koski touched him with a toe. "If you want it."

Rikky wavered to his feet, groggily.

"Help yourself to a drink." The lieutenant gestured broadly. "On the house."

The bartender cursed him, found a broken bottle with a half pint of Irish whisky in it, put the razor-sharp edge to his lips, drank deep. "What's it all about, copper?"

"You tell me."

"I was only covering up for a good guy."

"Covering up for a killer. Poodle Pete got his. You know who gave it to him. Spill."

Rikky drained the rest of the half

pint. "Well. If you know that much. I didn't want you to catch wise—on Marya's account as much as Ken's."

"Get to it," Koski said tightly.

"Liz was right. Ken was looking for a piece of pipe to fix his sink. He found it—somewhere in the Trident yard. Maybe it belonged to some other boat or came out of one. I wouldn't know." Rikky inspected a loose tooth in the cracked back-bar mirror. "What I do know is, Pete caught him with the goods, started an argument. Ken got sore, or scared maybe, and took a clout at the old gazink." He made a brief gesture, clenching his fist, pointing it at the floor. "Down goes McGinty."

"How'd you find that out? Caton come here after slugging Pete?"

"Yeah. He wanted to borrow a few markers—we used to be pretty good friends before the war—so naturally I get a double sawbuck on the line. I ask him why does he need the dough so fast, and he tells me."

"Said he killed Poodle Pete with the pipe?"

"Shucks, no. Said he crowned him. Thought the old coot might be hurt bad. Wanted to beat it until the thing cooled down, that's all. Jimminy, I didn't know he *killed* Pete!"

"Mrs. Caton know all this?"

"You can't prove it by me." Rikky found another whisky bottle, poured liquor on his palm, rubbed it on his scalp, grimacing. "I s'pose Ken told her something."

"Let's go over and find out."

Rikky flung his fingers out stiffly toward the wreckage. "Aw, have a heart! Leave my place like this? Look at it!"

"Didn't look so hot to begin with. Come on." Koski inclined his head toward the door. Rikky slammed a felt hat on his head, groaned with pain, stalked out stiffly.

Koski marched him across to the Trident yard, up the *Urchin's* ladder.

Marya came to the torn canvas before Rikky reached the coaming.

"Oh," she whispered. "*Rikky?* I thought—"

"Your husband," Koski put it to her brusquely, "won't be back right away. As if you didn't know."

SHE stared helplessly at the bartender. He hunched up his shoulders, held his hands out, palms up.

"The brass buttons knew it all, anyway, Marya. I had to tell him I lent Ken some moola to get away."

She made that quick fluttering movement of fingers to throat again. "He—*knows*?" She avoided Koski's eyes.

"I know you made a mistake trying to protect a creep who'd beat the brains out of a harmless old man, Mrs. Caton. Trying to warn him when he came around the boat—"

"*Steve!*" Mulcahey called loudly, from the foot of the ladder. "We found him."

Marya gasped, tumbled down the companionway, flung herself on a bunk, sobbing. Rikky followed her, fumbled at soothing her.

Koski went to the ladder. "Head bashed in, sarge?"

"Like you figured, yuh. What do you want us to do?"

Koski told him, quietly and quickly.

"Holy Mother!" The sergeant was startled. "Can such things be?"

"That's for you to find out, Sarge. The sooner the quicker." Koski went below.

Rikky was doing his best to console Marya. She wasn't having any. She crouched miserably at one end of the starboard bunk, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief.

Koski sat down opposite her. "You don't want to feel so bad about losing a guy who'd crack open an old man's brain and then fix things so you'd be holding the bag."

"That's what I've been saying!" Rikky muttered.

"Yair. You have so. You told me Ken Caton was a no-good rat who abused his wife and—"

"That's a lie!" Marya screamed. "A horrible lie!" she repeated more calmly, glaring at the bartender. "You know it's a lie, Rikky! How can you stand there and let him say things like that about poor Ken when you know he never hurt me or anybody. Why don't you tell him the truth, Rikky Lundgren! Why don't you!"

"Maybe, I can make a stab at part of it myself," Koski said. "I saw that busted compass up in the cockpit—that place in the curtain where somebody tore out a hunk so blood spattered on it wouldn't be noticed. I'd say there must have been quite a fracas right here on board the *Urchin*."

It was so quiet in the cabin Koski

could hear a tug hooting for the right of way at Hell Gate. He went on:

"Liz said Pete had been in the Anchor tonight, Rikky. That would have been to tip you off that Ken was going to be away from the boat for awhile, and—stop me if I get it wrong, Mrs. Caton—to warn you what Caton had said, that he didn't want anyone coming on board while he wasn't here. Meaning especially you, is my guess."

Marya watched Rikky like a person hypnotized. Rikky kept his eyes fixed on Koski.

"I expect that was all you needed to get you into the trap, Rikky. From the way Liz talked and the things you let slip yourself, plus the fact you managed to get this babe to set up an alibi for you—"

"No!" Marya breathed. "I never did."

"Sure. In reverse, sort of. But an alibi, just the same. What else is it when you don't contradict his story that your husband's run away? What do you call it when you phony things up by hollering 'Ken—Ken,' when all the time you knew your husband was dead?"

Tears streamed down her face. "I didn't mean to—didn't want to—but—"

"Yair. This big creep had something on you. Or you thought he had. He raised a hand in the "Stop" gesture to keep her from saying anything. "I don't want to know what it was—and where he'll be going, nobody else will have a chance to find out. If you'd been cuddling up to him a little while your husband was overseas—if you were hoping to keep him from finding it out—"

"I told Ken." The cry sounded as if it had been wrenched out of her by torture. "He knew. He hated Rikky because of it. But I didn't want *everybody* to know what a mess I'd made of things. And Rikky said—he said—" She couldn't finish.

"Yair. He would." Koski stood up slowly. "Just the sort of lad to bully you into clearing him and laying the blame on the man he'd just murdered. Your husband didn't have any intention of leaving you alone with the wolf practically on your doorstep. After he'd sent Pete over to bait the trap, he waited until Rikky slid out of the Anchor. The back way, eh, Rikky? Never mind, you got here. And Ken found you here. You fought. He got it."

Rikky shook his head unhappily. "You

got part of it right, copper. I didn't come over to make a play for Marya at all. I came over because he *had* killed Pete."

"See if you can sell it to the D.A. He buys those things once in a while. For my dough, you took the pipe away from him, hit him with it."

"If that was all there was to it," Rikky roared, "I could claim self defense and get away with it!" He stepped back to the foot of the companionway stairs, leaning against the gravity gas tank on

the curtain."

Rikky put a cigarette between his lips, flipped open his lighter, watched the small blue flame with a sort of dejected intensity:

"Tell him, Marya. Give him the straight on it."

"The straight," Koski retorted, "is that Pete saw you lugging the corpse, got suspicious when he saw the blood on Ken and wanted to call the police. You beat him to the punch. You brained him, too—and dumped him off the float near

The "Inside" of Detective Work



1. GETTING A CONFESSION

GETTING a suspect to talk is often a tough job, and requires a special technique, involving tact, shrewdness and bluff. Here are some of the elements of questioning.

Questioning takes place as soon as possible after the crime has been committed, but not before a preliminary investigation has been completed, the suspect searched, the scene of the crime visited and evidence and clues collected.

Each suspect is questioned individually, and none is allowed to hear the questioning of the others.

Questioning is in such a manner as to make it easy for the suspect to confess. Such expressions as "murder" and "burglary" and other harsh terms that may scare the suspect are avoided.

The suspect is almost never told the nature of the evidence in the case. The less evidence against him, the more thoroughly it is withheld.

Obvious liars are allowed to talk as much as they like. Invariably they contradict themselves and finally reveal the truth.

Then when the suspect does confess, the unalterable rule among detectives is—
GET IT IN WRITING!

—Carter Critz.

the after bulkhead. "I was right here. He jumped me."

KOSKI drew his gun, let it dangle at his side. "Don't waste it on me. Your legal beagle will probably think it's terrific. To me it's a lot of mahaha. I'd say you slugged him up by that compass box. But I don't care how you killed him—you did it. Then you threw the fear of God into this babe by threatening to expose your relationship with her or whatever. After you got that set, you carted the body overside. Down the ladder. That's when the blood got on

Ken. Hoping somebody'd be dumb enough to think Ken had murdered Pete and then drowned himself."

Rikky's right hand stroked the slender copper tubing which curved from beneath the gas tank to the *Urchin's* motor. He kept his eyes on the flickering flame of the light.

"If you won't speak up, Marya, I'll have to!"

He tugged ferociously at the macaroni-sized tubing. It came loose before Koski could raise his gun. Pink fluid spurted out. Rikky tossed the lighter at it.

There was a *whoosh* of blue incandescence and a sheet of vivid flame cut off the cabin from the cockpit.

Koski had time for one instantaneous snap shot before Rikky scrambled out of sight up the companionway. Then the lieutenant whirled, ducked into the "head" behind him, reached up, unhooked the hinger hatch over the toilet, banged it open.

He dived back into the cabin where Marya huddled, as if paralyzed, watching blazing rivulets trickle toward her.

He got his arms around her, tossed her up through the hatch on deck.

He put one more bullet through the companionway before he followed.

As he dropped the nearly unconscious girl to the ground, the rear of the cruiser opened up like the unfolding petals of a huge orange blossom. . . .

The avenue was crowded with shiny red apparatus. The bloodshot eyes of motor pumpers and chemical trucks spilled claret over the canvas covered hulls in the Trident yard. The night was noisy with gongs, sirens, much shouting.

Mulcahey watched the cloud of steam rising from the charred ribs of the *Urchin*.

"I thought these guys weren't allowed to keep their gas tanks filled while they are in yard storage, Steve." He turned to Koski.

"Aren't, Sarge. Ken was about ready to launch his boat, thought. He'd been retiming his motor, thought he'd take a chance and test it out on dry land, I suppose. He had ten gallons put in yesterday. Rikky knew that, I guess."

"You'll never know for sure, then. He didn't have an inch of skin left on him that wasn't crisp as a piece of burnt bacon, when they dragged him out."

"Eventually, why not now?" Koski murmured.

"Huh?"

"He'd have been burned anyway, sooner or later."

"I see what you mean. What I do not see is this: how did you figure this Caton's body was in the water, too, when you told me to have the boys grapple a second time?"

"The washroom. In his joint."

"Is that supposed to clear it up for me?"

"It was locked, Irish. Joints like that, you *have* to keep the men's room open. Rikky'd used it to clean off the blood on his clothes after the murder. Some of the clothes were still in there. He didn't have time to dispose of 'em, and he didn't want to be away from the bar too long and start suspicions. . . ."

"Oh! Yuh. Simple! When you state it thus."

"Well. Of course he gave his hand away when he tried to shut up dizzy Liz. If he'd just let her gabble on, I might not have given him a second thought."

"No?" The sergeant turned to gaze at the black hulls of the patrol boats—lightning-bugs, showing fitful lights around the float.

A distant hail went up. Searchlights dipped straight on the surface.

"They will have found Caton, Steve. Another of them post mortems you were talking about."

"We're improving, though, Irish."

"Are we now? With three casket cases on our hands in one night?"

"I think so. Too little help, maybe. But not entirely too late." Koski stared soberly at the internes standing by the blanketed figure of Marya Caton near the ambulance. "We were in time to save a little something out of the wreckage. Something worth saving, if you ask me."

THE STORY BEHIND DILLINGER'S DEATH

(Concluded from Page 83)

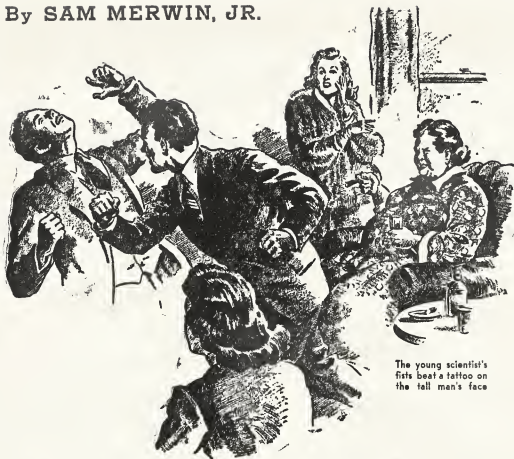
large reward, sealed Dillinger's doom.

Two years after she fingered Dillinger, Anna Sage was deported. Although she claimed she had been cheated out of the reward money, it is interesting to note that she led the life of a well-to-do citizen in her native Rumania. Her death at the age of fifty-eight was due to a liver ailment. Dowd was fifty-six when he died earlier this year.

Newspapers made much of the roles played by the Woman in Red and by the F.B.I. agents, but the reporters for the most part were unaware of the behind-the-scenes work of Sergeant Zarkovich. The modest sergeant didn't care.

He had avenged the death of a fellow officer and brought his assignment to a successful close.

By SAM MERWIN, JR.



The young scientist's fists beat a tattoo on the tall man's face

Amy Stops the Clock

The gargantuan Miss Brewster orders a four pound steak to fortify herself for a case with romantic overtones!

AMY Brewster eyed with distaste the half-dozen dishes from which she had breakfasted in solitary state in her suite at New York's Hotel Ritz. Growling inwardly at the emptiness of the cavern of her stomach, she made a mental vow to wring the neck of the Boston specialist who had frightened her into going on a diet as soon as she returned to her native city.

"Old fuddy-duddy!" she muttered, although the specialist in question was her junior by a decade at least. "Just

because he worries himself into chronic ulcers, he wants the rest of the world to live on milk toast."

In truth, a large fruit cocktail, an order of liver and bacon, three eggs and ham, buttered toast and a single order of hash-browned potatoes were scarcely enough to remind Amy's three hundred-odd pounds that they had partaken of any nourishment at all.

Reaching for the gin bottle and pouring herself a full tumbler of her preferred beverage, she downed it like wa-

ter, reflecting gloomily that even this never-failing cheer builder failed to have its usual bracing effect.

"Not even I can drink on an empty stomach," she reflected as she picked up the morning paper for the second time.

Usually inspired to a half-dozen activities by this matutinal task, the wealthiest, most radical and sole perennial apple-cart-upsetter of ten generations of Boston Brewsters found herself unable to find interest in the news.

Not that there wasn't plenty of it. Had she not been devitalized by lack of nourishment, she might have acted on any of several financial openings to drive wedges into the harmony of Wall Street.

The Society page revealed that one of her cousin Matilda's daughters had just eloped with a young man she knew to to have been the family chauffeur. And a Page One story that achieved prominence even amid a welter of national and international squabbles, stated that inventor J. Bennett Eden had been found with a bullet through his heart on the costly carpet of his study just east of Central Park.

WHILE Amy had never met Eden, she had on one occasion taken advantage of a process of his to make long-lived safety razor blades out of the cheapest of steel. Purchasing the process from his disheartened backer, she had forced the major companies to pool and buy the process from her for suppression purposes at a colossal profit. She had even awarded the inventor a large cut.

Yet though murder was one of her hobbies, as the police of several cities learned to their combined horror and gratification, Amy could not get interested. This she blamed on her lack of nutriment, although in every previous case in which she had successfully meddled, someone personally involved had appealed to her for help.

She was still unhappily wondering what to do about her indisposition when a knock sounded on the door of her suite. Thinking it to be the waiter, she growled a "come in" in the voice some wag had once likened to the late Sir W. S. Gilbert's "typical African swell, whose sigh was a hullabaloo, his whisper a horrible yell."

When no servitor appeared to remove the breakfast things, she looked up irritably, the full moon of her face bright with annoyance.

Standing in the doorway of the drawing room in which she sat were two of the most beautiful young people Amy had ever seen. And Amy, incredibly ugly herself and utterly without envy, had developed a vicarious delight in having decorative young folk around her, that had resulted in a true connoisseur's rating.

The girl, tall, slim but not too slim, possessed a rare, almost white skin underlaid with pearly vitality. She wore a smart black suit which was matched by her shoulder length shimmering hair. The delicately cut features of her face revealed pride, grief, fear and determination.

"Yes?" growled Amy, looking at the man behind her.

He towered a full head over the girl, was dressed with exquisite care in a gray suit which could have come only from three Manhattan tailors. His cordovan shoes were obviously bench made, and the heavy gold watch chain across his flat waistcoat, bespoke a quasi-humorous wish to indulge his own taste in fashion and the means to gratify it.

His face, below close-cut sandy-red hair, was ugly-handsome to the point of being distinguished and hinted at great charm when he smiled. He smiled now and stepped forward as his companion hesitated.

"Please pardon us, Miss Brewster, for crashing in on you like this," he said in a deep, rather nasal voice that was somehow not unpleasant. "But I assure you the matter's importance seemed to us to justify it."

"Go on," growled Amy, increasingly less displeased with the intrusion. "You're in. Say your piece."

"I'm Anne Waring," the girl said, plucking up courage. "Bennett Eden's niece. He was—he was murdered last night. Maybe you've heard about it."

"Maybe," said Amy. She nodded toward the tall young man. "Who's your boy friend?"

"Oh—this is Jimmy Stearns," said the girl, turning slightly red and looking a trifle annoyed. "He—he came along with me."

"Honored," said Jimmy Stearns, bowing slightly. Amy acknowledged his

greeting with a nod that made six chins of her habitual three. She had heard of Jimmy Stearns, a sort of latter-day dandy of the E. Berry Wall school.

"Okay," said Amy. "Why come to me?" Her words seemed to unlock a flood gate in the girl.

"Oh, we heard how you solved those insurance murders and the others," she said rapidly. "I know I have no right to call on you, but you see, it's about Cam Barden. He's going to be arrested because he won't tell on Yvonne and—"

"Hold everything," said Amy. "Sit down and let's get it straight. If there's anything I can do, I've got to have the facts. Now, begin at the beginning."

THE story was simple enough. Anne lived with her uncle and was, it seemed, sole heir to his very large fortune, save for the usual bequests to servants and others. Outside of four servants, the only other resident was Cameron Barden, young scientist who assisted Bennett Eden in the laboratory he maintained in the basement.

At eleven o'clock on the previous evening, Barden, who had been working late, came upstairs, found his employer lying on the living room floor, shot dead. The gun had been lying perhaps a dozen feet away and there was no question of suicide. Or so he had said when he reported the crime to the police at eleven-three.

Anne herself had been out at a party, visiting the various night clubs. Jimmy Stearns had joined the group shortly after ten thirty, had escorted her back to the house when word reached them.

"Sounds like a good clean crime to me," rumbled Amy. "Where do I come into it?"

There was, it seemed, more to it than that. The servants had been out for the evening, having left shortly after dinner when their employer was still in good health. No one apparently had entered at any time close to eleven.

"What makes them so sure of the time of death?" Amy inquired, lighting one of her large black Havana cigars.

"Why, Uncle Ben's wrist watch was shattered when he fell," said the girl. "They found bits of broken crystal all around it. It read exactly ten fifty-nine."

"I see," said the fat woman, scowling. "So that puts this Barden right on the spot. What about motive?"

"They think they have that," said Anne. "Cam and Uncle Ben had been quarreling over something they'd dug up. The police have arrested Cam—and I know he didn't do it. The better men like each other, the more apt they are to fight. But Cam wouldn't have killed him."

She was silent, her full lips compressed. Amy looked inquiringly at Jimmy Stearns, who sat quietly, fiddling with his heavy watch chain.

"What do you think about this young Barden?"

"Nice fellow, but not in my line," was the reply. "Dead set on science—like Ben Eden. I'm inclined to agree with Anne about it. But the evidence—"

"Who's this Yvonne you mentioned, Anne?" Amy asked.

"Why, she's—" the girl began, then looked helplessly at her companion. Jimmy Stearns coughed, then spoke.

"Ben had been a widower for a long time," he said. "Yvonne's a good-hearted girl. Good looking too. According to Anne, he had a date to see her at the house last night."

"Does she have a key?" said Amy sharply.

"I don't know," said Anne. "But she's a—a gold digger, and she had her sails set for Uncle Ben."

"Is that a motive for murder?" Amy asked.

"All I know is that Cam couldn't have done it," the girl almost wailed. "Won't you help us find out who did?"

"I'll try," said Amy, refilling her glass from the gin bottle. Her visitors rightly took the move as a gesture of dismissal and made quick departures. Amy picked up the telephone shortly after they had left, got room service.

"Send up a four pound steak," she commanded. "Good and rare. And a quadruple order of french fried potatoes." She slammed down the phone, puffed happily at her cigar. This was no time for dieting.

Two hours later, Amy was in Police Headquarters, talking to stocky Detective Lieutenant Nick Correll, who was in charge of the case. Long-term acquaintance, business and personal, with the Police Commissioner, had enabled her to swing the appointment. Amy was a law unto herself and had degrees from Harvard Law, Columbia Law and the Sorbonne to back herself with.

"It's open-and-shut," the harassed detective explained to the fat woman, who regarded him menacingly from across his desk through a blue cloud of cigar smoke. "The watch was busted when Eden was shot—at ten fifty-nine. The Barden apple was the only one in the house. He calls us a couple of minutes past eleven. And he's got a motive."

"Give on that motive stuff," snapped Amy.

"He'd come up with a trick device that, he claims, will make an indelible pencil last practically forever," the detective said. "As if we haven't enough lifelong fountain pens already."

"Hmmp," said Amy. She puffed on her Havana for a long thirty seconds. Then, "I want to talk to him."

"Only his lawyer can do that," said Correll. "And we haven't had him twenty-four hours yet."

"Has he legal representation?" Amy asked.

"Not yet," the detective replied smugly. Amy rose to her full five-foot-five and stabbed at him with the end of her lighted cigar.

"Well he has now," she roared. "And if you don't want everybody from the Commissioner on down climbing your frame you'll let me see him right now!"

"But it's open and shut," the detective protested. "Two and two make—"

"Make any number you can think of," snapped Amy. "Get busy and get me down there."

SHE did it in a matter of minutes, and found herself sitting in a cheerless Headquarters room with a tousle-haired, tired young man whose mouth drooped from the strain he had been under.

"I can't understand it," he said when he had finally realized that Amy was accepting him as a client without fee. "You'd think I'd have heard the shot. And I didn't hear a sign of anyone in the house when I came upstairs."

"Okay," said Amy, whose searching black eyes had satisfied her that he was telling the truth. The problem, if this young man were innocent, was a tough nut to crack and therefore worthy of her attention.

"I believe you, Cam," she went on. "But what about this invention the police have twisted into a motive."

"They have it all backwards," Barden protested. "I got lucky last month and came up with a new treatment of pencil carbon which makes it indelible and would give the average lead pencil a life of about a year."

"Is it cheap?" Amy asked quietly.

"Why, yes—that's the trouble. Mr. Eden wanted to put it on the market and I didn't want him to. Think of the people it would put out of work!"

"Who owns the process?" Amy asked.

"I do," the young man said. "But I wouldn't have considered putting it out without sharing the rights with Mr. Eden. He befriended me when I came out of the Army and gave me a chance to work on my own with his equipment as well as help him with his own lab work. When he had me patent this thing of mine I let him handle the details as a routine matter."

"Okay, Cam," said Amy. "What about this Yvonne woman? Young Anne Waring seems pretty hot about her."

"Yvonne Duncan?" Barden grinned for the first time. "She's a bit theatrical, but I liked her. Heck, Mr. Eden had a right to some fun, I guess. Why?"

"Anne seems to think Eden had a date with her last night. Know anything about it?"

"He might have," said Barden, rubbing a chin that needed a shave. "Come to think of it, he did say he'd be busy. I'd not have bothered him if I hadn't seen the study door open and the lights on. Gee, I'm tired."

"Take it easy," said Amy, rising and putting an amiably pudgy hand on his shoulder. "Incidentally, young Anne seems to think pretty highly of you."

"Of me?" He seemed honestly astonished. "But she doesn't even know I'm alive." His expression softened and Amy chuckled inwardly. An incurable spinster herself, she had a very pronounced Dan Cupid side to her make-up.

"Try her and find out," she said. "And one thing more—I'd like to handle this indelible pencil of yours in lieu of a fee. I'll see that no one loses a job over it."

"Okay," he said bitterly. "I guess I'll have to let you. I haven't anything else."

"That's what you think," said Amy as she left him.

Back in her suite at the Ritz, Amy sat down to drink gin and think it over, munching on a gargantuan bowl of peanuts as she did so. The case was puzz-

zling all right. And if two and two made four this time, all of her heretofore impeccable judgment of character was at fault.

FINALLY she picked up the phone again and got busy. Yvonne Duncan, whom she found at home, had the husky, rather pleasant voice of a torch singer, which she readily admitted to being. She was regretful if not too broken up over the tragic demise of Bennett Eden.

"Sure I went over there last night," she said. "I was due to see Ben at ten-thirty, but I was late—which is a laugh. Usually it was the other way around."

"You mean Mr. Eden made it a habit of not being on time?" the fat woman wanted to know.

"He never knew what time it was," Yvonne Duncan replied. "Imagine a rich old fellow like him—always calling up Meridian One-two one-two to get it."

"Do tell," said Amy, beginning to see a trace of daylight. "What happened when you went over there?"

"Well, I rang the bell and nobody answered," Yvonne Duncan replied. "I got pretty peeved, especially after all the times he's kept me waiting for him. So I scrambled."

"Did you see anyone around that looked as if he might have come in or out?" Amy asked.

"A tall guy came down the steps as my cab pulled up in front of the joint. But I didn't pay any attention. With his niece and all, lots of people came and went."

"Thanks, Miss Duncan," said Amy, glowing like an incandescent she-Buddha. "Would you care to come down here for a drink and go over this with me at five? I'm at the Ritz."

"If it's free loading, I'm your gal," said Yvonne. Amy hung up, sat back and chuckled. So two and two had to make four, did they? Well, two pencils and two grosses of pencils didn't make four. It was odd that she should be thinking of pencils.

Amy's next call was to her broker's. Issuing orders like a chicken colonel, she told him to get busy and dig out extensive stock holdings in major fountain pen and ink companies. After much moaning, groaning and gnashing of

[Turn page]

Learn ELECTRICITY OR RADIO IN THE GREAT SHOPS OF COYNE

Your Choice of TWO GREAT FIELDS

Learn Quickly!

Prepare for the future with ALL-AROUND TRAINING. Come to the SHOPS OF COYNE in Chicago, the school with 45 years of training experience. Two big opportunity fields. Thousands of graduates in industry.

ELECTRICITY

INCLUDING INDUSTRIAL ELECTRONICS

Big future in Power Plant Work, Motors, Armature Winding, Home and Factory Wiring, Appliances, Refrigeration, Maintenance, Illumination, etc. Electricians are in demand everywhere—lifetime job service. Many earn while learning. Send for BIG FREE BOOK on COYNE Training.



RADIO-Television

A great field now, even greater growth ahead. Here at COYNE you're trained for Construction, Testing, Trouble-Shooting on Radio, Public Address, Sound Picture Units, Training includes P.M., Photo-cells, Television, etc. Many Coyne-trained men own well-paying radio businesses of their own.



Not a "Home-Study" Course!

You get actual shop work on full-size equipment plus necessary theory. Whether you had previous experience or not makes no difference at Coyne.

NON-VETERANS WHO ARE SHORT OF MONEY can finance most of their tuition and pay it in easy monthly payments after graduation.



Electric Refrigeration

This training means additional opportunities. Training in this field now added to our Electrical or Radio course.

MAIL COUPON FOR FACTS!

See how we make it EASY for you to get ready NOW! Check course you prefer and rush to us for full details. FREE. No obligation—no salesman will call. Do it TODAY.

Approved for G. I. Training

B. W. COOKE, President
COYNE ELECTRICAL and RADIO SCHOOL
Dept. 88-64K
520 S. Paulina St., Chicago 12, Ill.

Send me your BIG FREE BOOK — for the course checked below. Also full details of your Student Finance Plan.

☐ ELECTRICITY

☐ RADIO

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY..... STATE.....

Some Causes of Chronic Ailments

**FREE BOOK — Explains Dangers
Of Related Ailments**



Learn the serious nature of Piles, Fistula, Colon, stomach and associated disorders. Write today for a FREE copy of a 40-page illustrated book. Thornton & Minor Clinic, Suite 956, 224 McGee Street, Kansas City, Mo.

START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

on our capital. Always your own boss. Hundreds average \$6,000 to \$25,000 annual sales year after year. We supply stocks, equipment on credit. 900 home income. Selling experience unnecessary to start. Wonderful opportunity to own pleasant, profitable business backed by world-wide industry. Write RAWLEIGH CO., DEPT. I-U-TQ, Freeport, Illinois.

Be a DETECTIVE

Learn at Home in Your Spare Time

Be your own boss! Earn good money in your spare time. Interested? Write for FREE BOOK describing training and opportunities. State Age.

INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE TRAINING SCHOOL
1701 Monroe St., N. E. Dept. 199A, Washington 16, D. C.

"HOW TO WIN PRIZE CONTESTS"
AMAZING BOOKLET \$1.00

WRITE DEPT. 62

"GADGETS," BOX 28, JACKSON HEIGHTS, NEW YORK

SAVE on High Quality GABARDINE Dress Trousers for Summer Wear

WORTH \$10. High volume enables us to give exceptional value! Fully guaranteed—write pay order! Genuine virgin wool and linings rayon. Cool, comfortable. Twill weave resists wrinkles, holds crease, gives amazing wear. Expert fashion tailored for perfect fit. Zipper front. Recessed pockets. Blue, Tan, Beige, Lt. or Dr. Brown, Blue-Gray. WAIST SIZES: 30-35 1/2 36-38 1/2 39-41 1/2 42-44 1/2. \$6.95

SEND NO MONEY! Send name, waist size, color. Pay postman only \$4.95 plus small postage. Or, send money and save postage. Money-Back Guarantee!

LINCOLN TAILORS, TF-9, Lincoln, Nebr.

AGENTS WANTED!

Make Sensational Profits! New, sell-on-eight Plastic Line: Tablecloths, Aprons; many other splendid fast-selling items, novelties. Postal brings free details, special deals. No obligation. Write today. Hurry!

ROYALTY SALES COMPANY

Box 748 Passaic 38, New Jersey

A LAUGH ON EVERY PAGE OF

CARTOON HUMOR

Featuring America's Funniest Cartoonists

NOW ON SALE—25c AT ALL STANDS!

teeth, they agreed to get busy at once.

"I want a full report by five o'clock," she stated with the assurance of a woman who could buy and sell her broker with only a little more strain on her resources than the average woman in search of nylons or a roast.

Her next call was to Lieutenant Correll, who replied with dubious enthusiasm.

"Listen, Nick," she said, indulging her usual habit of using the first names of all and sundry on short acquaintance. "What about the gun that killed Ben Eden? Has it been traced yet?"

"The D.A. will kill me if I tell you that," was the detective's unhappy response.

"He'll get killed professionally and you along with him if you don't," snapped Amy. "I've tossed plenty of unhard-earned cash into this machine here in town. And if you give the right answers, I'll toss the case in your lap."

"I've got all the answers," Correll snapped. "It's open and shut, I tell you. Two and two—"

"Quiet!" roared the fat woman. "Have you traced that gun or haven't you?"

"Okay." The detective gave up. "A fellow bought it yesterday from a pawnbroker down on the Lower East Side."

"Has he identified the purchaser?" Amy asked.

"He says it was a tall young guy," said the detective defensively. "He says it could have been Barden."

"Not good enough. Bring your pawnbroker up to the Ritz a few minutes before five and I'll bet you the price of a steak dinner I'll have a man he can identify. And better bring Barden along with you. You won't want him back in the Tombs when I get through with him."

It took considerable more doing, but once again the Brewster name, fame and fortune prevailed. It was as an afterthought that Amy asked him the name of Bennett Eden's watchmaker and received information that the broken wristwatch had come from a small, costly and exclusive Fifth Avenue firm. Chuckling, Amy hung up.

YVONNE DUNCAN, half hidden behind a silver fox jacket, arrived on the dot, living up to her self-avaowed

reputation for promptness. Amy greeted her cheerily and waved her toward a barette adorned with an interesting array of bottles and various mixings.

After a startled glance at Amy's three hundred pounds and her cigar, Yvonne, who was blonde, well-cushioned in the right places and probably in her late thirties, complied in haste. A latent friendliness about the companion of the slain inventor, a friendliness barely denied by the shrewdness of her artfully-lashed light blue eyes, appealed to the fat lady.

"Maybe," said Yvonne, seating herself, glass in hand, in an easy chair, "I shouldn't be doing this so soon after—well, so soon after Old Ben got killed. Don't think I wasn't fond of him. I was. But—" She shrugged her be-silver-foxed shoulders expressively.

"I've always thought grief a barbarian surrender to the emotions, myself," said the fat lady. It took Yvonne a good ten seconds to digest this, but when she had she nodded.

[Turn page]

America's Most Entertaining Picture Magazine!



Packed with Fascinating Photo Features!

NOW ON SALE—15c AT ALL STANDS!



YOU
can
acquire

LAW NIGHTS AT HOME! L.L.B. DEGREE

LaSalle's famous Law Library—used as reference in many Law libraries and Law offices—has enabled thousands to master Law surprisingly fast, in spare hours at home, for business and professional advancement.

These 14 remarkable volumes, compiled by leading professors and lawyers, cover the whole basic field of Law in condensed, orderly, simplified manner.

You advance rapidly with this great library, plus special lectures furnished. We guide you step-by-step with personalized Problem Method of instruction . . . you learn by doing—handling legal problems—not by memorizing rules.

Send for two FREE 48-page booklets, "Law Training for Leadership," and "Evidence," answering questions about Law and its value to you, and telling how LaSalle Law graduates are winning rapid advancement in business and public life. Mail coupon below. No obligation.

LA SALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A Correspondence Institution

417 S. Dearborn St. Dept. 9329-L Chicago 5, Ill.

Send me your two FREE booklets described above without obligation.

Name Age

Street

City, Zone & State

BE A DETECTIVE

WORK HOME or TRAVEL. Experience unnecessary. DETECTIVE Particulars FREE. Write to GEO. R. H. WAGNER, 125 W. 86th St., N. Y.

FREE
BOOK



RAISE HAMSTERS

The new wonder animals from Syria. Often called Toy Bears. Delightful pets. Everyone wants them. Laboratories need thousands. Clean, odorless. Raise anywhere. A profitable and interesting hobby or business. We furnish breeders and instructions. Write today for free book.

GULF HAMSTERY, 1537 BASIL ST., MOBILE, ALA.

PULVEX FLEA POWDER

TWO KINDS

WITH 5% DDT

... for dogs. Kills fleas and lice quick. Keeps fleas off 5-7 days. Many home uses.

OR WITH ROTENONE

... for cats, dogs. Quickly kills fleas, lice. Kills fleas when put on a single spot. Pre-war formula.

OTHER KINDS 25c & 50c



Guaranteed by
E. J. McLaughlin

What To Do For Pains of ARTHRITIS Try This Free

If you have never used "Rosse Tabs" for pains or arthritis, neuritis, rheumatism, we want you to try them at our risk. We will send you a full-size package from which you are to use 24 Tabs FREE. If not astonished at the palliative relief which you enjoy from your sufferings, return the package and you owe us nothing. We mean it! SEND NO MONEY. Just send name and address and we will rush your Tabs by return mail.

ROSSE PRODUCTS CO., Dept. 291

2708 Farwell Avenue • Chicago 45, Illinois



STUDY AT HOME FOR PERSONAL SUCCESS AND LARGER EARNINGS. 39 years expert instruction—over 11,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. Send for FREE BOOK NOW!
AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 32-1, 812 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.



**Learn Profitable Profession
in 90 days at Home**

MEN AND WOMEN, 18 to 30

Many Swedish Massage graduates make \$50, \$75 or even more per week. Large full time incomes from doctors, hospitals, sanitariums, clubs or private practice. Others make good money in spare time. You can win independence and prepare for future security by training at home and receiving for 90 days. Anatomy charts and 32-page illustrated book FREE—Now! This course costs \$5.00 or \$10.00 in cash. Dept. 6531, 100 E. Ohio St., Chicago 11



STOP TOBACCO

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Reliance. Write for free booklet telling of inflexible effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men.

35 Years in Business
200,000 Satisfied Customers
THE NEWELL COMPANY
153 Clayton St., St. Louis 5, Mo.

FREE BOOK

RUPTURE!

An amazing Air-Cushion Invention allows body freedom at work or play. Light, neat, cool, sanitary. Durable, cheap. Day and night protection helps Nature support weakened muscles gently but surely. No risk. Sent on Trial! Write NOW for free booklet and Proof of Results. All correspondence confidential.
Brooks Company, 183-B State St., Marshall, Mich.



**A Penny May Bring You
HAPPINESS!**

Would you gamble a penny to win Happiness, Companionship, Love, Financial Success, Security, the help of a mysterious International Secret Organization? Then just send name and address on a post-card TODAY for your FREE Copy of great book "Maze of Mysteries". It can change your whole life! Address: Rose Dawn, The Maze order, Dept. 886, P. O. Box 2710, San Antonio, Tex.



**Suffer Varicose
LEG SORES?**

IF you suffer pain and misery of Varicose Veins, or Open Leg Sores, send away at once for FREE Booklet "THE LEGS AND SORES FOR HOME USE". Tells all about this 40-year-old method, praised and endorsed by thousands. Llewellyn Methods, Dept. 33-J 326 N. Green Bay Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

"You and me both," she said, Then, "If you'll pardon my curiosity, what in hades is this all about?"

"You'll find out soon enough," said Amy, and as a knock sounded on the door again bellowed a "come in."

This time Jimmy Stearns and Anne Waring entered. At sight of Yvonne, the inventor's niece stiffened, but Amy's hearty bellowed greetings forced her to overcome her reluctance to share a room, much less a drink, with the overstuffed blonde.

"Do I understand you to say you've solved Uncle Ben's murder?" the young-er girl asked eagerly as her escort poured her a scotch and soda.

"Yup," said Amy. "One more phone call and it's in the bag. I'll change brokers if they don't reach me soon."

"Good grief, was young Barden fooling around in the market?" Jimmy Stearns inquired, handing Anne her glass and looking at Amy incredulously.

"Pretty heavily in his own way," said Amy, pouring herself another glass of gin and puffing at her cigar.

"I don't believe it," said Anne promptly. "Cam may not have known I was alive, but I know him well enough to feel certain he simply couldn't gamble. His is the kind of scientific mind that has to know all the facts before it can make a move. I should know that."

"Anne!" said Stearns, looking concerned. "I had no idea you cared so much for him. I thought he—"

Whatever Stearns thought was never revealed, for just then the telephone rang. Amy picked it up, listened briefly, then growled, "And it's about time," into the mouthpiece. She listened some more, then roared a "thanks" and put the hand set back onto its stand.

"All wrapped up," she said, beaming seraphically.

"Did Cam—" Anne began, trembling with nervousness. Amy shook her head and emitted a growling laugh.

"No, Cam didn't," she replied. "Hey, Correll, bring in that sick poodle of yours. It's in the bag."

The bedroom door opened and the detective entered, half-dragging a terrified, shabby little man through it after him. He took one look at Jimmy Stearns and pointed a quivering finger at him.

"That's him!" he cried in heavily accented tones. "That's the man who buy the gun. You no send me to prison for it, please, Mister Detective."

"You're sure?" the detective asked. The rest of them in the room sat like statues, including the newly accused.

"Sure I'm sure. I remember the red hair now under his hat. You no send me to prison, please!"

"Tell him to go home and take a bath," said Amy. "I think that does it, all right."

The little pawnbroker was sent packing, and Lieutenant Correll, looking warily alert, stood over Jimmy Stearns.

"Okay," he said. "What about it?"

"Well, what about it?" Stearns countered. "Is the word of a seller of unlicensed weapons better than mine? Anybody could have bribed him to identify me." His gaze centered on Amy, whose habitual high color faded to an angry white.

"There's more to it than that," said the fat woman, her black eyes snapping with rage. "If Ben Eden had put young Barden's invention on the market as he planned to do, Stearns would have been wiped out. He's in over his head backing one of the new pen-and-pencil outfits. I'll have the figures here by messenger within half an hour."

FOR the first time, the man-about-town's composure broke. He moistened his lips with his tongue and sagged visibly. Then he braced himself and smiled indulgently.

"And what about the evidence of the wrist watch?" he asked quietly, lighting a cigarette.

"That's easy," said Amy with a wave of her cigar as Lieutenant Correll looked at her incredulously.

[Turn page]

BEST NEW TOP-FLIGHT CRIME
FICTION IN
**MYSTERY BOOK
MAGAZINE**

NOW ON SALE—25c AT ALL STANDS!

CRACKS, ITCHING between TOES?

Help Yourself to Quick Relief with QUINSANA
—Amazing Results on Athlete's Foot!

Tests prove that 9 out of 10 get complete relief from itching, burning Athlete's Foot after 30-day Quinsana treatment.

Quinsana's antiseptic action helps prevent the growth of the fungi that cause Athlete's Foot. It works fast to end the misery of itching, cracking, peeling between toes. And daily Quinsana use helps prevent recurrence of Athlete's Foot!

Relieve burning tired feet! Soothing, cooling Quinsana Foot Powder helps keep feet dry, comfortable. It aids in absorbing excessive perspiration. Quinsana helps combat foot odor.

Shake Quinsana on your feet. Shake it in shoes to absorb moisture. Use Quinsana every day.

MENNEN QUINSANA FOOT POWDER

High School Course

at Home Many Finish in 2 Years.

Go as rapidly as your time and ability permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. topics supplied. Diploma. Credit for A. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and society. Men's be handicapped all four in the 2 High School graduates. Start your learning now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H886, Desai, at 29th, Chicago 37

INVENTORS

Learn how to protect your invention. Secure "Patent Guide" together with "Record of Invention" form—without obligation.

CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON

Registered Patent Attorneys

55-G District National Bldg. Washington 5, D. C.



SEND FOR THIS **FREE!**

Make money. Know how to break and train horses. Write today for this book **FREE**, together with special offer of a course in Animal Breeding. If you are interested in Galting and Riding the saddle horse, check here () Do it today—now.

BEERY SCHOOL OF HORSEMANSHIP
Dept. 529 Pleasant Hill, Ohio

You Can Learn to Be an ARTIST

Trained Artists Are Capable of Earning \$40, \$60, \$80 Weekly. Many of our graduates are now enjoying successful Art careers. By our practical method, famous since 1914, we teach you Commercial Art, Cartooning and Designing AT HOME IN YOUR SPARE TIME. Write for details in FREE BOOK. "Art for Pleasure and Profit," explains course and commercial opportunities in art. TWO ARTISTS' OUTFITS furnished. STATE AGE, G.I. APPROVED STUDIO 669M WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF ART

1115-15th Street, N. W. Washington 5, D. C.

Free for Asthma

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is difficult because of the struggle to breathe, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Company for a FREE trial of the FRONTIER ASTHMA MEDICINE, a preparation for temporary symptomatic relief of paroxysms of Bronchial Asthma. No matter where you live or whether you have faith in any medicine under the sun, send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing.

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO.

939-B FRONTIER BLDG.

462 NIAGARA STREET BUFFALO 1, N. Y.

When PRAYER FAILS

The prayers of the most worthy people often fail. Why? The unworthy often have the greatest health, success, riches and happiness. The best, smartest, and most industrious people often have only pain, poverty and sorrow. Why? Thirty years ago, in Forbidden Tibet, behind the highest mountains in the world, a young Englishman found the answers to these questions. His eyes were opened by the strangest mystic he met during his twenty-one years of travels in the Far East. Sick then, he regained health. Poor then, he acquired wealth and worldwide professional honors. He wanted to tell the whole world what he learned, and offers to send a 9,000-word treatise, FREE, to everyone who asks promptly. It is a first step to the POWER that KNOWLEDGE gives. There is no obligation. Write for YOUR FREE COPY today.

**INSTITUTE OF MENTALPHYSICS, Dept. 280-G
213 South Hobart Blvd., Los Angeles 4, Calif.**

Learn BAKING At Home

Baking is one of America's high industries in wages. Nearly depression-proof. Thorough basic home course lays sound foundation. If you have aptitude, write for FREE BOOKLET, "Opportunities in Commercial Baking." National Baking School, 1315 Mich. Ave., Dept. 1808, Chicago 6.

LOSING YOUR HAIR?

Have Dandruff? Annoying Itchy scalp? Dull, lifeless-looking hair or thin fuzz and want thick, healthy hair? We may solve your problem easily and inexpensively, in the privacy of your own home. We are helping many people and may help you, too. For FREE BOOKLET write today.

THE MODERN SYSTEM, INC.
3220 Hudson Blvd. Dept. K. Jersey City, N. J.

GET ZIPPER SHOES... Don't Pay a Cent!

Earn Big Money in Spare Time, Too

Act at once to receive exclusive seasonally popular Zipper Shoes for personal wear, just for showing our great line of over 200 fast-selling Shoe Stores to friends, and taking a few orders. Big Cash Profits for easy, pleasant work in your spare or full time. Send post card NOW for FREE Sample Outfit, Tested Sales Plans, and Personal Shoe Offer.

FREE

Sample
Outfit

VICTOR THOMAS SHOE CO.,
Dept. V-161
Chippewa Falls, Wis.

LAW STUDY AT HOME FOR PERSONAL SUCCESS
AND LARGER EARNINGS. 39 years expert instruction—over 114,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degrees awarded. All texts furnished. Easy Payments. Read for FREE BOOK NOW!
AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 93-T, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

FREE ENLARGEMENT of your Favorite Photo

FROM FAMOUS HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS

Just to get acquainted we will make a beautiful 5 x 7 enlargement of any picture or negative. We are to include color of hair, eyes and clothing and get our bargain offer for having your enlargement beautifully hand colored in oil and mounted in your choice of handsome frames. Please enclose 10c and your original picture or negative will be returned with the

Free 5 x 7 enlargement postpaid. Act now! Limit 2 to a customer.
HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS
7021 Santa Monica Blvd., Dept. 459, Hollywood, Calif.

"It's what?" he countered.

"Easy," said Amy and spelled it out. "Most of us have foibles, and Bennett Eden was no exception. He hated to have things repaired and that included his watch. I found that out from his jeweler, who's been after him to get it regulated for years."

"Why, that's so," said Anne Waring, looking surprised. "He had an awful time keeping it right."

"He didn't keep it right," said Amy. "Now, Yvonne, tell the lieutenant how he was never on time."

"Old Ben was always late for our dates," she said, ignoring the look the younger girl sent her way. "He was always calling up Meridian to get the right time. I even bought him a new watch, but he wouldn't wear it. Said he liked his old one and was used to it."

"You mean the watch was wrong when it was broken?" said Lieutenant Correll, openly startled.

"Of course," said Amy, looking at Stearns.

"Has any of you stopped to realize," Stearns said drily, "that if Bennett was always late for appointments it meant his watch was slow. While if he was killed before eleven last night, it would have registered much earlier."

"Naturally," said the fat woman, unruffled. "But I just consulted young Cam Barden on that. He stated something I already suspected. Like others whose watches run slow habitually, Ben Eden had the habit of setting it well

**AMERICA'S
SECURITY
LOAN**



BUY BONDS TODAY!

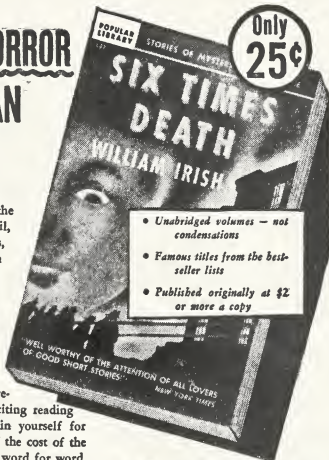
HOW MUCH HORROR CAN A MAN BEAR?

HOW often can Fate turn the tables to overwhelming evil, before a man cracks up? Six times, in "Six Times Death," William Irish subjects a human being to such sheer torment—in six haunting, horrifying stories. A collection of mystery and suspense stories that will hold you breathless!

Choose "Six Times Death"—or any other Popular Library reprint—and get \$2 worth of exciting reading or more, for *only* 25c. Entertain yourself for hours on hand, for a fraction of the cost of the original editions. Page for page, word for word, they're the same books that were originally published to sell for \$2.00 or more.

POPULAR LIBRARY MYSTERIES

- 137 SIX TIMES DEATH, by William Irish
- 120 THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE, by Ethel Lima White
- 121 A LOSING GAME, by Freeman Wills Crofts
- 112 THE BLACK SHROUDS,
by Constance & Gwenyth Little
- 126 THE DEADLY SUNSHADE, by Phoebe Atwood Taylor
- 124 DESIGN IN EVIL, by Rufus King
- 125 SAID THE SPIDER TO THE FLY, by Richard Shattuck
- 132 SEVEN KEYS TO BALDPATE, by Earl Derr Biggers
- 133 ADVANCE AGENT, by John August
- 130 THE MYSTERY COMPANION, edited by A. L. Furman



- Unabridged volumes — not condensations
- Famous titles from the best-seller lists
- Published originally at \$2 or more a copy

POPULAR LIBRARY *Specials*

- 150 CROSSWORD PUZZLES, Book Two
- 102 DUEL IN THE SUN, by Niven Busch
- 94 THE MORTAL STORM,
by Phyllis Bottome
- 91 THE SEA-HAWK, by Rafael Sabatini

Popular Library, Inc., Dept. TFG9
10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y.
Send me postpaid the Popular Library books I have circled. I enclose 25c (in coin or in U. S. stamps of small denominations) per copy. (NOTE: We pay postage on orders for 4 books or more. If ordering less than 4 books, please enclose 3c per book extra for postage.)

91	112	124	130	137
94	120	125	132	150
102	121	126	135	

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY & ZONE _____ STATE _____

ORDER BY
NUMBER MAIL COUPON TODAY

**Amazing Discovery Makes Seat Covers Fit Snug,
Smooth Without Expensive Installation Cost**



DE LUXE QUALITY

Scotch Plaid
Genuine Fibre

**Auto SEAT
COVERS**



A SOLID BACK
For 4-door
Sedan.



**B DIVIDED BACK
SOLID SEAT**
For Coupe or
Coach front.



**C INDIVIDUAL
SEATS**
For divided
back and seat.

**CHOICE OF FRONT
SEAT STYLE**

Simple to Order

Now it's no longer necessary to pay fancy prices for long-wearing fibre seat covers because of expensive installation! Just fill out the coupon indicating front seat type illustrated on left. They slip on easily . . . you can install in a few minutes. Perfect fit guaranteed or money back on our 10-day inspection plan. Mail the coupon today. Set of 3 Car Initials given at no extra cost.

FOR COUPES

and All

Front
Seats **\$3⁹⁸**

*Fits
most Cars!*

Sedans and Coaches

COMPLETE SET

Front and
Back Seat **\$7⁹⁸**

SPECIAL

**DISTRIBUTED DIRECT
BY MAIL OFFER SAVES MONEY
EXCLUSIVE! Not Sold Elsewhere!**

At last you can enjoy the comfortable coolness and handsome appearance of beautiful automobile seat covers, expertly tailored of genuine Scotch Plaid Fibre, without paying fancy prices! An amazing discovery, elasticized slip-over sides, now insures snug, smooth fit without expensive installation costs. Over 100,000 satisfied users can't be wrong! These wonderful, colorful seat covers slip on in a jiffy . . . anyone can easily install in just a few minutes! Often gives your car greater trade-in value. Yes, for a better-looking car, for cooler and more comfortable driving, get brand-new seat covers for your car while this new bargain introductory price is yours for the taking. Mail the coupon today. Supply is limited.

SEND NO MONEY . . .

10 DAY HOME INSPECTION OFFER

**The NEW
EASY
SLIP
OVER
STYLE**

**Anyone Can
Now Put On
in Only a Few
Minutes . . .**

If you need new automobile seat covers, either for front seat alone or for front and back seats, mail your order today. We fit most makes and model cars, including 1948 models. Fill out and mail the coupon . . . on arrival pay only \$3.98 for front seat or \$7.98 for complete sets of front and back seats, plus C.O.D. postage. Do this on our home inspection offer . . . if not delighted, return covers in 10 days, and we will refund your money. But don't wait. This introductory offer can't go on forever. Fill out the coupon and mail today.

SPECIAL! Set of 3 car initials

INCLUDED WITHOUT EXTRA COST

Simple to permanently mount, these chrome plate metal initials glamorize every car. State 3 initials you want. Kit comes complete ready to use, entirely without extra cost. Mail coupon today.

INITIALS

**MAIL
COUPON**

AMERICAN MERCHANDISING CO.,
Dept. SC-140
9 Madison Ave., Montgomery 4, Ala.

Please send me the DeLuxe Seat Covers for car checked off below:

Make _____ Model _____ Year _____

FRONT SEAT TYPE: A _____ B _____ C _____

CHECK ☐ I am enclosing \$_____ In full payment. Send Postpaid.

☐ Send C.O.D. I will pay postman \$_____ plus postage.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____

Also include CAR INITIAL Kit of 3 initials and liquid adhesive for permanent mounting in 10 seconds. Send these 3 Initials: Print Plainly.

\$7.98 for
Complete Set

AMERICAN MERCHANDISING COMPANY,

Dept. SC-140

9 Madison Ave., Montgomery 4, Ala.



"He's added another choice item to his collection!"

Choicest item in *any* man's liquor cabinet—that familiar amber decanter of Calvert Reserve! For here, in this fine whiskey, you'll find the superb result of Calvert's unequalled blending experience...a whiskey you'll prefer because it's smoother, mellow, tastes better. Try it, and you, too, will switch to Calvert!

Clear Heads Choose **Calvert**

CALVERT RESERVE, Choice Blended Whiskey...86.8 Proof...65% Grain Neutral Spirits
Calvert Distillers Corporation, New York City